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ALONE



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ALONE

(A Beautiful Land of Dreams)

by

GEORGE WESLEY DAVIS

Author of

*The Dance of Death, Acadia, Sketches of Butte
The Soul of Octavia, Etc.*



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LOS ANGELES

CALIFORNIA

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FOREWORD

All the world over the word California seems symbolic of sunshine and flowers. The wonderful state that lies alone beside the Pacific welcomes the stranger with the warm, soft breath of spring and is truly "a world beautiful"; a land where the romantist dreams by night and by day, still,—amid the wonderful beauty, there is startling romance and tragedy.

I shall take the reader on the desert that lies to the East, and we will sit on the Palisades that look down upon the ocean that lies to the West. We will spend a night in a Gypsy camp where the picturesque descendants of the old Romany tribes are, and we will visit the semi-ruins of an old Spanish Mission and listen to the wonderful stories of an aged padre who still holds services there. He will show us through the quaint garden and a cemetery, and the reader will see in the latter Bret Harte's description of the cemetery at the Mission Dolores.

I shall take the reader to a dance of all nations, and there witness the "Andalusia,"

the most famous of Spanish dances, and to make my pen picture true and follow the romance, the readers must pardon my taking them where tragedy, romance and social deception exists.

G. W. D.

CONTENTS

	Page
Foreword	5
The Palisades.....	11
Chapter	
I At Eventide	13
II The Stranger at Govante Pier.....	21
III The Writer Meets Aunt Mary on the Palisades	28
IV Merle Chapman Visits Father Diaz at the Old Mission.....	43
V A Night in a Gypsy Camp.....	58
VI He Named Them "The Foot-Hills of Heaven"	66
VII A Night Ghosts Walk.....	78
VIII The Confession	89
IX He Tells of His Wanderings.....	94
X A Dance of All Nations.....	107
XI Swept Away in the Surf.....	124
XII Moonlight and the "Ave Maria".....	128
XIII In the Shade of a Yucca Palm.....	133
XIV They Talked Through the Long Hours of Night.....	142
XV Merle Writes to Father Diaz.....	153
XVI A Few Years Later.....	157

ALONE

THE PALISADES

Let me sit and dream on the Palisades,
Where the sea and mountains meet;
Where song-birds carol amid fragrant bloom
And breakers dash at my feet.

Give me the old rustic bench
At twilight or the break-o'-day,
And there let me drink in the pure sea air
And drive all cares away.

From that rustic seat on the Palisades
I watch the sun go down;
While listening to the warblers' good-night chirp,
And the mighty breakers sound.

I love the twilight as it lingers long
Then fades to purple dusk of night;
The balmy air from the sea below
And the breath of flowers hidden from sight.

And from that same old rustic bench
I watch the birth of day
As the sun comes up with its golden rays
To drive the mist away.

I listen to birds salute with their songs
The new and balmy day;
And watch flowers open their bright petals
And waft perfume to the heavens far away.

Give me the old rustic bench on the Palisades
While morning light comes o'er the lea ;
Or in the crimson glow of the close of day
When the sun kisses the sea.

CHAPTER ONE

AT EVENTIDE

It was the dream hour of the day, a time when the golden poppy, like a benediction, leans its head towards the setting sun and folds its leaves for the night, and while a stranger quietly passed along the bloom-lined paths on the Palisades, the lavender moss that clings to the crags, like a tired child, slowly closed its petals and fell asleep.

He was idly strolling towards an incline that led to the ocean promenade, a walk that stretches far to the south in its winding path on the drifted sands. He loved life and stopped now and then to listen to a mocking-bird carol and the orioles chatter with their mates who were nesting in nearby trees. As he slowly walked along, the low hills took on a mystic coloring, and when he reached the placid sea with its many twilight hues intense and fascinating in shimmering mystery, cottagers were standing in their doorways silently watching the sun-glow and golden sheen of the waters blend into crimson purple while the sun slowly and mysteriously passed from sight.

"It is all so beautiful," he mused, as he drew his cloak over his shoulders and silently passed on down the concrete walk where, in the distance, lights of a pleasure resort were breaking forth, and the reflections from lights of the promenade made tints of jade and old rose in the breakers that came close to his feet. His hair was prematurely grey, but his lips and eyes told that he was in the most interesting period of life. His carriage was not that of a youth, but of one who knew and appreciated life in its fullest. "I'll stop for a few moments and rest," he said to himself, as he took a seat on a rustic bench that faced the sea. The tints of twilight were like the blending of sunlight and moonlight, and he sat fascinated by the wonderful color effects in the water.

Soon an old woman, leaning heavily on a staff, came and sat on the same resting-place.

"You don't mind my sitting here, do you?" she asked, in mild, pleasing tones, as she placed at her feet a small basket. "I've a crippled sea-gull in the basket," she said, "and I'm taking it home to mend its wing."

The stranger intently watched her as she removed her shawl and wrapped it around the basket. "It might be cold," she said, without

looking up. "It gets cold here in California when the sun goes down."

Her attire was in marked contrast to her well modulated voice. Her clothes looked neat, but the many patches spoke of almost extreme poverty, and he at once became interested and sat silently looking on as she again placed the basket at her feet.

"Would you like to buy some shoe strings?" she asked as she raised her head and pushed back a lock of grey hair that had fallen over her forehead. Her unsteady hands were twisted by rheumatism and it seemed an effort for her to open a small bag she carried on her arm.

"Are you obliged to sell these things in order to live?" he asked seriously.

"No," she answered, "I have a little money in the bank, but do this to keep from thinking too much of the past, and then again I am all alone in the world, with no one to help comfort my life, and I must prepare for years that may come."

She sat for a moment gazing into space and then turned and faced the stranger. "You are a stranger," she said as she took notice of his garments. "I walked behind you for some time before you sat down."

He smiled but did not answer the question.

"Your whole bearing is that of an officer," she continued, as she moved closer and placed her trembling withered hand on his cloak. "The Navy?" she smiled.

"No; I am just a writer drifting around looking for material," he quietly answered, while watching the sad face beside him.

"Are you alone?" was her next question.

"Yes, as you say you are, and as your beautiful state stands here alone with the waters of the Pacific kissing the picturesque shores of the west, and to the east lie the sands of the desert. I have been in California many times," he continued. "I love the Gypsy life you lead here in the Golden West. The first time I came we traveled over a great desert and then for hours under snow-sheds, and at last our train pulled out into the bright sunlight, and from the top of a mountain range we looked down upon what seemed to be paradise. This last time I came, the train passed through cuts in sand-dunes, and on over drifted sands where the cactus grows, and no water is; but much smell of hot sand, and at last—without warning of a vast change—the delicate perfume of orange blossoms came to us and in a few moments we were passing through groves where the blossoms with green and ripe fruit hang from the trees at the

same time. Fences and nearby piazzas were shaded by crimson and white ramblers, and roofs of many bungalows were almost hidden by flowering vines," and he told of having seen an artistic cottage painted in light grey, and how—over part of the roof that also was grey—the dashing purple bougainvillea grew, "and it fell in such graceful festoons at the corner of the porch," he said, "and it seemed like traveling through a wonderful bouquet with never ceasing fascination, and I remember passing a terraced place where the graceful branches of a Babylonian Willow drooped and shaded a sparkling fountain, and now on this side of the state we look out on the vast expanse of the wonderful Pacific, and when I am here in California I feel as if I had been born again and had left all sorrow and strife in the former life." And the old lips parted in smiles when he told of his love for the beautiful land that lies alone between the sunrise and the sea.

"My friend, you are right"; spoke the withered lips of the old woman. "Many weighted down by sorrows and with heart-strings about to break, come here to build up, or amid the beautiful scenes, lighten the burden they carry, for who could not help seeing 'a world beautiful' here in this land of sun-

shine and flowers where we seem so near to God."

"It is a fascinating land," he answered, and again sat silently listening to the soft, euphonious voice of the old woman, and when she finished speaking, he told her of his work, and how his desk in his hotel stood by a window that looked out on attractive grounds. "I often tire," he said, "and lean back in my chair and dream, and in my dream I listen to the birds sing and twitter in a Camphor tree close by, and from where I sit I look out upon a tall Canary palm with long, graceful branches, over which a Passion vine grows, and when in bloom is ravishingly beautiful, but at all times a poem in itself, and at night I often lay and listen to the mocking-bird's midnight song. I love to come here and bathe my thoughts in the freedom and good fellowship that exist in this far western state."

"Yes; you are right. California does stand alone, and oh! so beautiful," was the only comment she made.

"Why am I talking so freely with just a wanderer," he thought, as he sat watching the interesting face of the little woman. "Her life, I believe, would be an interesting story if one could get at it," he mused. "At times

she seems evasive," he thought, "and then again there is something about her that encourages conversation," and he found himself wondering if age bent the frail figure and whitened the hair. He studied her closely as she spoke, and as he listened he became more uncertain.

"If you are here looking for a story you will not be disappointed, for there is plenty of material here, both good and bad," she smiled sadly, and again sat in silence for a few moments, then slowly moving her head from one side to the other, continued: "Yes, both good and bad."

"Perhaps you can give me some pointers," he said pleasantly.

"No," she answered, "I will not tell you any more at present. I'll let you wander around for a few days and if you do not find any subjects in that time, I will point out some."

"But where shall I find you?" he asked.

"I will keep track of you, for I am on the beach every day," she smiled. "Later in the evening you had better walk on just a little further and listen to the band concert." And as she finished speaking, she placed the staff in front of her and with some difficulty rose to her feet. "I must move on," she smiled

again, as she took up the basket, “and give the gull some supper.”

He watched her as she slowly walked on a few yards and then stopped and took from her pocket a piece of bread and gave it to a hungry dog and then slowly passed on in the same direction most of the other people on the promenade were going.

“There is a tragedy buried in the old heart,” he said half aloud, and then sat for some time gazing far out on the sea that was slowly turning to a darker hue as night-time came on.

CHAPTER TWO

THE STRANGER AT GOVANTE PIER

The tints of twilight had melted into dark shades of night when the stranger reached the plaza of Govante Pier. Soft strains of an Italian classic came to where he stood. "How strange it all seems," he thought, as he moved on a few steps and stopped again to make further observations of the unusual scene.

He idly leaned against one of the pillars that supported the gallery of one of the nearby buildings that faced the rows of benches where many people sat, and where he might see the whole sweep of the plaza and be undisturbed by the throng of sightseers. "How incongruous," he said, half aloud, as the "jazz" music of a merry-go-round mingled with the fascinating strains of the Italian band. And from where he stood he could hear the constant grind of an old water-wheel and the stentorian call of the megaphone man: "Come, go over the falls! Don't miss it, for everybody goes over the falls!"

And then he heard the soft tinkling sound of

small bells and a foreign dialect: "Geedep, my leetla keedes, geedep!"

He turned in the direction from which the sound came and saw a lame Italian leading four goats that were hitched to small carts in which happy little children sat driving. He was intensely interested, and did not hear a woman who carried a tambourine in her hand come to where he stood. She was called "Salvation Nell," for she gave most of her time in doing not only for the poor but for those who had sorrows and were not able without mental help to meet life as it came to them.

"You are a stranger here," she said with a pleasant smile, and as they stood conversing their attention was attracted to a tall young man of unusual carriage who came to the further end of the plaza and stood alone while seemingly listening to the music. His hair was long and light in color. "A Genoese," mused the writer, as he took notice of the hair and his attire which was that of a gentleman—dark and modest.

The young man's eyes nervously traveled over the throng and at last rested on a young woman who sat on one of the many benches that were near where the stranger and "Salvation Nell" stood.

“Who is she?” asked the writer, as he noticed his companion’s eyes also turn to the woman on the bench.

“She claims to have been a professional dancer in Russia, and is married to a mighty fine American,” she answered, “but she is known here on the beach merely as Zita.”

While speaking they noticed a little old woman, short and fat, who wore a long fur coat and a cream-colored mantilla over her hennaed hair hurry out of the crowd and go to the side of the young man who stood alone nervously twirling his silver-mounted stick.

At first he paid no attention to her, and to an onlooker it would seem as if she were one he did not know, until she placed her hand on the back of his uncovered hand, for on the other he wore a grey silk glove and carried the unused one in that hand.

As he turned his head to speak to her, he also turned his body half way around, and after nervously glancing to see that no one stood near or watching, he took something from his pocket and placed it in the handbag she carried. She quickly closed the bag, and after again placing her hand on his, hurried off.

“Who is she?” asked the writer, as they watched her dodge here and there amongst

the throng of people, and then—with her face half hidden by her mantilla—she hurried down the concrete walk and was soon lost in the darkness.

“No one knows,” was the quiet answer. “Some people call her a fortune-teller and some think she is a hypnotist, but all join in calling her ‘The Woman of Mystery,’ and the young man is called Larry O’Flynn.”

“Euphonious,” laughed the stranger. “He is a perfect type of Italian found in Genoa and that part of Italy.”

“I believe at one time in another city,” she said, “he was known as Signor Bonino.”

When the old woman passed from sight the young man, swinging his cane and with a pretense of being oblivious to the surroundings, quietly went to the bench where Zita sat, and without speaking took a seat beside her and sat apparently listening to the music. Zita knew he was there, but like a bird nesting, kept perfectly still, thinking she was away from the idler’s eyes, but the writer was quick to see, and a knowing smile played over his lips.

“What is the relation between those two?” he asked.

There was no answer in words. “Salvation Nell” merely smiled and then said: “I must

leave you now, for here comes Aunt Mary and I wish to speak with her for she knows everything," she said pleasantly. "Look at her now as she stands watching that young man."

He looked in the direction she pointed and saw the old woman standing steadily gazing at the man "Salvation Nell" had told him was called Larry O'Flynn.

"She never misses an opportunity to be near and watch him, and I really think that is what brings her to the Pier every night."

When he saw whom she referred to, he said to himself: "Why, that's the old woman I met on the promenade."

After a short talk with "Salvation Nell," Aunt Mary joined the crowd that was going along the pier that extended from the plaza to a miniature island of broken and queer looking rocks.

"I'll walk slowly and watch her," he mused, as he made his way towards that part of the pier. Aunt Mary did not stop at any of the booths, but went direct to the further end of the board walk where the breakers were loud and dashed high on the rocks. Her infirmity made it difficult at times for her to walk along the pier where the throng of sightseers jostled each other for places of vantage. This night

she walked slowly, and at times was hidden from sight, but all the time kept on towards the further end of the pier. It was moonlight, and the sheen on the water that rolled and tossed was of many hues, and brilliant like waves of spangles. At last the stranger saw her leaning against the railing at the extreme end of the walk, and keeping in the shadow, cautiously moved near to where she stood, but it was only for a moment, for soon he heard her soft, impassive voice: "I wonder if his slumber is broken by the cold waves that dash over these rocks," and as she finished speaking, she turned and retraced her steps.

The writer walked slowly behind her until he came to the entrance of a dance hall, and there he stopped to watch the dancers. Soon the young man whom he thought was a Genoese came and stood near by. Surprise shone in the stranger's eyes as the young man removed his hat that had covered his unusual brow and forehead. "Two characters in one," he mused, as he watched the face that had the appearance of being artificially whitened and the lips that were rouged.

People passing along the walk would stop for a moment and some boldly stare at the

young man, whose eyes nervously traveled over the surroundings, while others passed on with a knowing smile playing over their lips.

CHAPTER THREE

THE WRITER MEETS AUNT MARY ON THE PALISADES

On a rustic bench near a lone cypress that stands like a sentinel by night and by day, Aunt Mary sat quietly drinking in the pure sea air. A handkerchief was spread over her lap and she was eating a piece of coffee-cake that was made in coils and had sweet glazing over the top.

While she idly picked bits of citron and raisins from the cake, she did not hear approaching footsteps, for her attention was directed to a side path where a young man was hurrying along to the further end of the pretty park that overlooked the sea. "Larry O'Flynn," she said half aloud, as she watched him pass from sight.

The stranger heard the words and moved to where she sat in the shadows that had begun to lengthen.

"Good evening, Aunt Mary," he said, as he took a seat beside her.

She noticed him glance at her lap and quickly said: "I often bring my supper here

and eat it in the twilight while watching some of the flowers that fall asleep in the evening's glow. How did you know I was called Aunt Mary?" she asked with a pleasant smile.

"'Salvation Nell' told me that was what people called you, and she also said you knew everything."

"What may I call you?" she asked, with a friendly twinkle of the eye for the old soul had a great sense of humor.

"I am just plain Merle Chapman," he laughed, as he thought of the odd situation. "If I am pleasant with her," he speculated, "I wonder if she would confide in me, for I feel sure she has a secret buried deep in her heart."

"We are going to have an agreeable sunset," he said, in way of making conversation.

"Agreeable," she answered, in much surprise. "They are all agreeable here, for there is never a day so foggy, or one with mist and rain, but what the sun at twilight breaks on the rocks of that distant main. It seems like a child waving a goodnight as it sinks to rest, and in a few hours it comes back again o'er the lea."

"And you have been here at the break-o'-day?" he interrupted.

"Oh, yes; many a time," she said with much

spirit, "and I shall never forget one night when there was a storm on the mighty deep and the breakers rolling high. It was moonlight and the bay was a burst of glory with its glistening waters gold and blue and dancing tints of jade."

"Not an ordinary person," he thought, as he listened to her words.

"That night I went close to the rolling waters and walked on the drifted sands while watching the sheen of the moon and stars mingle with reflections from shore lights, and it made a brilliant scene like fairyland. It was all so beautiful I stayed on the sands until the moon hung low in the heavens and then came back to this rustic bench and here in the quiet, while the sun's golden rays came o'er the lea and kissed the sparkling dew, I watched flowers open their petals and send forth perfume, and squirrels scamper at play while orioles sang, and as the day grew brighter white sails unfurled to the gentle breeze and the notes of the fisherman's song as he sailed out to sea came to join the music of the stirring trees. Just before the break-o'-day the sea and sky blend in a mist like tears, and it would seem as if the sunbeams came to drive the mist away."

As she spoke, his eyes searched the withered hands for a wedding ring, but did not find one there.

"You must like verse," he said, "for you see so much of the beautiful in life."

"Life is beautiful even to those weighted down with sorrows. I love to watch the sun-rays wake the dreaming flowers." She sat a moment as if meditating: "Yes," she said without looking up, "read some verses to me. Poetry is the blossom of life, but some get so little of the bloom. I wander around and find mine, but it is not always in the sunshine."

"I will read to you a few verses," he smiled, as he took from his pocket a small bit of paper. "I wrote these lines last night while sitting on this same old bench."

"Read them to me, please," she said, as she looked up with wistful eyes that interested him more than would those of just a wanderer.

"I think she is becoming interested and may yet confide in me," he mused, as he smoothed out the paper and began to read:

"It was moonlight on the Palisades
And all around was still,
Save the rolling crystalline sea below
And the mocking-bird's midnight trill.

“A sweet scent came on the gentle breeze
I knew not from where,
So I wandered around in bloom-lined paths
But could not find it there.

“It was a fragrance dainty and strange;
A perfume that only comes at night,
It lured me on through arbour'd paths
Then out in Saturnian light.

“And there beside a rustic fence
I saw a maiden, oh! so fair,
As she stood in dream-wrapped quiet
In the moon-drift glare.

“She stood with the breath of God about her
In the sheen of the moon and stars;
Her feet rested on a blanket of bloom
And I whispered ‘The Goddess of Mars.’

“The soft perfume lured me to where she stood,
With cluster lights at her feet,
And beyond were sands like drifted snow—
Kissed by sprays from the billowy deep.

“And there I found a bloom resting near her heart,
Wafting its breath in the quiet night;
It was a spray of black acacia she wore
On the bosom of her robe of silvery white.”

“There are some blossoms that send forth
perfume only at night,” she said, with a know-
ing sparkle in the eye as she sat watching the

writer. "Youth has not all disappeared," she smiled teasingly. "Life is wonderful, and it is interesting to see the part some of us are called upon to play. To me it is like a great drama full of joys, tragedy and sweet sorrows, and it is a study to watch the different ones play their part," she hesitated a moment before continuing, "some almost sink, for in places the waters are deep in the river of life." As she spoke there was something in her old voice—a softness that was like unspeakable music and drew him closer to her.

"Aunt Mary," he said, "I am going away for a few weeks."

She did not look up nor speak until he told her of the Mission he intended visiting on his trip.

"Why go there?" she said, with almost fear in her expression. "There are many much more interesting ones and nearer here."

He noticed the startled expression. "How strange," he thought, but soon dismissed it from his mind.

"I, too, journey once in awhile, for sometimes I long for a change and go far back towards the Sierra mountains that lie to the east of Pasadena, and there I see and talk with those who do not care for the sea, and would

rather rest in the shadow of oaks or beneath the protecting branches of the stately sycamore and breathe in the perfume of wild flowers that grow in profusion on the picturesque foot-hills, and on my journeys I sometimes sit on the grassy banks of a stream and bathe my hands and face in its cool waters, and watch birds dress their feathers." She looked in the writer's eyes and smiled as she continued: "Perhaps they are more painstaking than I, for their gowns are so wonderfully beautiful in rich colors and glossy dressing. I often unroll my blanket and lie down to rest on the brown hills that slumber in the summer sunshine. I always make my journey in the summer, for there is never any rain during that season and the nights are warmer."

"You do not travel at night?" asked Merle in much surprise.

"No, I sleep on benches in parks or beside a hedge, for the money I derive from the sale of shoestrings and pencils is barely enough to pay for my food."

"The poor old soul," thought Merle, as he became more and more interested, and his eyes again traveled to her lap and her supper that consisted of a piece of yellow coffee-cake with bits of citron and raisins in. "I wish I might

do something for her," he mused, "but her dignity forbids."

The bench upon which they sat was not far from a long flight of stairs that led from the ocean promenade to the park above. They were partly hidden by an *Escallonia* that was in full bloom, a flower that as eventide creeps on gives out more of its aromatic fragrance.

"What a pungent perfume," said Merle, with a desire to encourage the old woman to talk. "So different to what the delicate white and pink blossoms would suggest. One would expect to see a flower more like the dashing Spanish Broom."

There was no response to his words; her eyes were riveted on a dark object coming up the steps. As he sat silently watching, she moved closer to the sheltering branches and soon Zita came to the top step. She did not notice those on the bench close by as she quickly turned into a path that led in the same direction as did the one Larry O'Flynn had taken. Neither one spoke for some moments, but sat quietly watching the nervous woman hasten her steps and pass into the deep shadows of palms and cypress that afforded wonderful spots for trysting.

Merle placed one of his hands over the frail

old hand that had fallen away from her lap and rested on the board seat. "Aunt Mary," he said affectionately, "tell me something about this woman who just passed by." There was no response for a moment, and the old woman's face turned from the deep purple shadows that engulfed Zita's form to the mystic glow that lay to the west, and told of the closing day. "Is she in any way associated with your life?" The old woman seemed startled and turned quickly when she heard his words. Her lips moved, but no sound came and her eyes turned back to the waters that hid the mysteries of the sea. Merle sat quietly watching the frail hand that lay in her lap pick at the remaining bit of coffee-cake and he half wished he had not asked the question. "What shall I do to rouse her?" he thought,—and then spoke words that were intended to draw her thoughts from the sea, the purple shadows, and the two who were meeting clandestinely. "Tell me more of your interesting journeys inland," he said coaxingly and feigned the attitude of a child asking for a story. The old woman looked up with appealing eyes and merely asked for more verses. He was anxious to please the old soul for his interest in her was now taking on much sympathy and he incorporated it with his great

desire for a story,—to know the tragedy he felt sure she was keeping from the world and with the fortitude of a brave soldier kept it buried in her heart, that oftentimes ached and ached in the wee small hours of morn. She again spoke of life and her great interest appealed to him. “Isn’t life beautiful?” she said, as she turned and placed her free hand over the one that rested near her. “Isn’t nature beautiful?” She sat in silence for a moment and in that time her eyes traveled to some sleeping flowers at her feet. “Even to me here alone there is much of the beautiful in life, although I often travel down the road to Yesterday, and on that journey I pass by the shadows that mark the sadness that came into my life and only see the bright spots, and as for the future, I shall smile as long as I can, even if the smile at times must be forced through tears, for a smile and kind word to a wandering soul means so much, and while giving that smile sunshine comes to our own path,—and so I hope to pass the remainder of my days. Mr. Chapman, do not ask me to talk of myself, but read to me some more of your verses, for you must have many.” He did not have any more with him, but while she spoke he remembered a poem he had written

on a former visit to California, and it brought back pleasant memories of a journey taken to the Forest of Arden, the country home of a noted actress, and when he mentioned the name of the place a smile played over the old face. "I have been there," she said, and then asked Merle if he would repeat the lines. His eyes shone as he listened to her well modulated voice. "The great Polish woman befriended me at one time." "I'm getting something now," he thought, but she again sat in silence, as if waiting to hear the words. "Perhaps I can remember the lines," he said with an affectionate smile:

"From the drifting sands of the mighty sea,

he began, and the frail old woman nestled back in a corner of the bench and pulled her faded shawl over her shoulders, while she sat quietly listening as he continued,

"Through a field and flowering garden,
We followed a trail o'er a dew-kissed lea,
On our journey to the Forest of Arden.

"With dilated nostrils, our steeds turned in
To a path the Padres trod;
It was marked by bells of El Camino Real,
'Twas like a road leading to God.

- “We traveled along the King’s Highway,
To the music of whispering winds;
Our path led through a perfumed aisle,
And we reined in many times.
- “Sweet odors came from orange groves,
And mocking-birds sang in the palms;
And we reined in again to watch the birds
Bathe in lily ponds.
- “With eyes alert, our steeds cantered on,
In the fragrant breath of the rose;
Some growing in tramp-like freedom,
Others in stately rows.
- “In the mellow light of middle-day,
We turned towards the low, green hills;
And on past myriads of blooming shrubs,
That grew beside murmuring rills.
- “We rested in the shade of a sycamore tree,
And drank from a mountain brook,
That sparkled and sang with a lullaby sound,
As it flowed from a canyon nook.
- “We followed a path leading through chaparral,
Growing on the low hill side;
And reined in again on the mountain top,
That was bathed in the glow of eventide.
- “To the music of all nature the sun went down,
And the world took on its crimson glow;
And mountain peaks were like diadems,
Like the sun shining on snow.

“From those lofty heights,
We looked down on a wonderful garden;
And in the mystic shadows of the valley beyond,
Lay the beautiful Forest of Arden.”

When he finished repeating the lines, the old head nodded in approval, and a happy smile enveloped her withered face. “You speak of the dainty, feathered folk who live in nature’s music,—we have five hundred varieties of birds in our beautiful State. Of course, that includes those of adjacent islands,—but they are numbered a part of Californian Avifauna. They are ducks, geese and rare migrants and many interesting specimens have been brought to our museums.”

“Salvation Nell was right,” mused Merle, “when she said, ‘Aunt Mary knows everything’—a wonderful old woman and a faithful sentinel guarding her secret.”

“As I said before, I have spent many hours in the study of flowers and birds, and at times almost live apart with them.” And she told of a visit she had made to an estate lying within the limits of Los Angeles and of her joy in the grounds that were much like an English estate. “The grounds are closed in,” she said, “by a high brick wall, over which ivy and many colored ramblers grow, and high, iron gates open

and close as noiselessly as the sun-rays come to brighten the foliage.” And she told how timid she was when she passed through the main gates and slowly walked up a concrete incline that led to the porte-cochere over which wistaria grew in graceful festoons. “My fears were soon allayed, for the young master was in the grounds and bade me come in and enjoy the surroundings,—” and with a sad, pleasant smile she continued to tell of his courtesy. “And I felt quite at home,” and Merle noticed as she spoke she bit her under lip, and there seemed to be a wild stare in her eyes. “We went,—I say ‘we,’ for he kindly showed me through his lovely place and we talked long and pleasantly and he told me many things about the song birds,—things I did not know. We sat near a fountain and watched humming birds bathe,—” and she told how the little hummers would fly through the sprays that shot up from where gold-fish swam underneath lily-pads. “They would fly through the mist-like sprays then ruffle their plumage and dart off to a trellised columbine close by,—gather honey for awhile and then back and again through the spray, and when their bath was finished, or mostly finished, I remember seeing them fly to another fountain, where the water rose in hook-like

fashion and settle back in another pond where several golden wrens were bathing in miniature lakes that had formed on lily-pads. The little hummers would throw their bodies back and stick their tiny feet out in the water, and I remember watching one little fellow sitting on the water, where it fell in a graceful curve on its way back to the pond. The little bunch of feathers would bounce like a tiny ball, as the water sparkled and bubbled,—and he seemed to love to be tossed about.” And Merle was intensely interested when she described in detail the variety of little bunches of feathers of this species of birds.

“There were little black fellows with iridescent purple throats,” she said, “and another all vivid green with ruby-colored throat, and still another, a golden bronze mite. They were pugnacious little fellows and seemed to rule the domain. Isn’t life beautiful?” she again said, but Merle noticed a tinge of sadness in her voice, and he also noticed her glance in the direction of the deep, purple shadows, and he said to himself,—“The sentinel is still on duty.”

CHAPTER FOUR

MERLE CHAPMAN VISITS FATHER DIAZ AT THE OLD MISSION

A dragon-fly poised for a moment above the writer's head and then lighted on a dry leaf where it seemed to fall asleep. Hornets lazily crawled in and out of holes in crumbling blocks of old adobe, and birds softly sang in a great gnarled tree with drooping branches that were laden with red berries, and all nature seemed drowsy.

It was a true California summer day, balmy and restful. Father Diaz sat in the cool, unbroken stillness of a tile flagged porch where adobe and redwood arches supported a roof of red-baked tiles richly mossed with age; tiles that were made by the Indians of early days.

It was a time of the year plants rest, and nature spreads over the hills a mantle of brown. On his journey to the old mission he had passed through a wilderness of beauty, a paradise of live oaks with festoons of blue-green moss, and as he reached the mission he faced a new scene of picturesque interest. Indian and Spanish halfbreeds idly sat around, and there were

some dark skinned senoras carelessly working on bead ornaments, while others were smoking and lounging in the shade of palms and trees with sheltering branches, and the picture was a shadow of the brilliant past.

He stood leaning against an iron post that supported one of the bells that mark El Camino Real, the path where the padres trod,—the King's Highway.

The belfry of the old mission, with its rusty bells whose music at one time filled the air, gave the sombre surrounding a color of romance, and the yellow bloom of the cactus blending with the brown adobe of the ruins of Indian huts fascinated him, and it was some moments before he spoke to the old padre who was reading and had not heard him approach.

“Father Diaz,” he said at last, “I have come to pay you a visit.”

“You are welcome, my son,” answered the kind old padre, as he held out a feeble hand to the stranger when he passed up the steps that were mossy and broken.

“I am only a wandering writer,” Merle laughed, “gathering material here and there. I wanted to see you and your picturesque mission so have traveled a long way in the footprints of the old padres, for I wanted to get

the true atmosphere. I have stopped to rest beneath a graceful sycamore, and then wandered on and rested again in an eucalyptus grove aglow in scarlet bloom. Oh! how I love California, and I love the eucalyptus although it is an adopted tree and so different from others, for it sheds its bark instead of its leaves."

"My son, there are many adopted trees in California. The early fathers brought cypress saplings from the Holy Land and planted them at Monterey, and they grow on what is now called Cypress Point. After you have rested a bit, I will show you through the mission, but as you love nature so much, I am going first to take you through the garden and to the little cemetery where I hope some time my tired body will be laid to rest."

"Let us go now," said the writer; "I am anxious to see it all."

The dark robed father, with feet incased in sandals, rose from his rustic chair and they were soon in the little garden where the paths were strewn with memories, and where life had often unfolded itself. Low growing things in beds overgrown with weeds were fighting for life and flowering vines wandered in ragged confusion.

“My garden was not always like this,” said Father Diaz, in way of an apology. “For some years I had a most wonderful little woman with me, and she kept my garden like a beautiful miniature park. But she went away, and her disappearance was as mysterious as her coming.”

They walked on in silence until they came to a gate that was covered with moss and hinges that screeched when opened. As they passed through, he continued: “When she left I found my hands were too old and feeble to do the work.” At the time his words did not carry with them anything of interest to the writer and he did not comment.

“How interesting,” he mused, as they walked around the paths that were like places where sheeted memories come and spirits walk in shadows, “and it reminds me so much of what Bret Harte wrote of the cemetery at the Mission Dolores, ‘A weedy, tangled, down-at-the-heels cemetery with tombs and headstones at all angles; yet in a way, more eloquent of the past than the taciturn old church, for every headstone tells a story,’ and I guess he was right.”

Near the crumbling wall that was partly covered with ivy and other ramblers that grew in

tramp-like freedom, the grave of one of the first padres was shaded by the drooping branches of a Babylonian Willow, and each branch of the great gnarled tree seemed to speak of Time's mystery.

They moved on a few paces and then stopped at a trellised shrine overgrown with passion flowers that sheltered a small statue of a Madonna. "Here she spent many hours," said the old padre, and his lips trembled as he spoke, "and she planted this vine herself."

He carefully arranged a branch that seemed to be wandering away. "She was a gifted little woman," he said, as he took the writer by the arm and turned towards the church. "Come, I want to show you some of her work in art."

"How strange," thought Merle, as he followed the father into the church that was like a massive pile of crumbling adobe half hidden here and there by flowering ramblers with blossoms of many colors.

"Come with me," he said, as they entered the building, and the writer followed him to a small room where in some of the corners cobwebs seemed never to have been molested.

"This is where she spent many hours. She used to gather and press Magnolia leaves and paint pretty scenes on them, and when she had

painted a sufficient number to fill a small box, I would send them away to be sold. She would never accept money for what she did in the garden and around the church, and it was from her paintings she derived enough to buy things that were necessary for herself. See! these are all her work," he said, as he pointed to the walls where several unframed pictures hung. "Poorly clad and half starved looking, she came to my door one morning and asked if I had any work she could do in payment for some food. She was emaciated and oh, so tired looking."

"Just a moment," interrupted Merle, as he stepped close to an easel where an unfinished picture stood. It was a half finished portrait of a man and on the wooden frame of the easel, the part that showed just above the canvas, was written:

"In the desert a fountain is springing
In the wide waste there still is a tree;
And a bird in the solitude singing,
Which speaks to my spirit of thee."

"Who is this man?"

"I do not know," answered the father. "It is a copy of a small photograph she carried with her."

As Merle stood quietly looking at the picture,

the padre turned away, but soon came back. "See!" he said, as he opened a small box, "she had it almost full and ready to send away."

"Will you give me one?" asked Merle, as he examined the dainty paintings. "Or, better still; let me buy one and you can put the money in the box, for she may return some day." His eyes half closed as he again looked at the picture. "The little leaf may be a clue," he said to himself.

"I fear she will not return," said the father, as he sadly shook his head, "but you may do as you wish."

Merle carefully placed one of the leaves between some papers he carried in his portman-teau.

"Tell me more about her, will you, father?" and as he spoke, he again looked at the unfinished portrait and his mind traveled back to Govante Pier and the young man whom he thought was a Genoese.

"What do you think of this face?" he asked the padre.

"I have often studied the face," answered the father, "but to me there seem to be two faces, or I should say—two characters, for the brow and forehead is of a criminal type, while the lower part of the face impresses me differ-

ently, for it is as mild and delicate as that of a child."

Merle was silent as he spoke, but in his mind he traveled to the young man he had seen with Zita and back again to the bit of unfinished portrait on the easel. "How true the old padre spoke," he mused. "Two characters in one: the criminal and that of a child."

"You asked me to tell you more about the little woman."

"Yes, father; I am interested." He was careful not to show the great mental unrest he was experiencing.

"As I said before, she came one morning and asked for food, and when I told her I had plenty of work she could do she was truly grateful and went about her task with a zest surpassed by none. During the afternoon I went into a part of the garden where she was at work and her sad little face looked up to mine as she spoke: 'I feel a beautiful protection here,' she smiled, and then again quietly turned to her work. She told me she was of our faith and that a few days previous she had stopped at a little church by the wayside and a father there had heard her confession and had given her absolution. When she told me of the kindness of the father, her lips trembled and tears

came to her eyes. 'My sins were not many,' she said, in a voice hardly above a whisper, and I knew they were not and never questioned her.

"As her first day here grew into twilight, the question confronted me, 'Where shall I put her for the night?' and soon she settled that question, for she had already chosen one of the old Indian huts that stand just outside of the garden wall and close to the gate, and there she lived until she went away."

"But why did she leave these things?" asked Merle, in much surprise.

"She may have wanted to take them," answered the father, "but she went away in the night-time and the gate was always locked at night."

"And you do not know why she went away?"

"No"; he answered, "and we miss her much and in so many ways. I did not know of her musical talent until one day when I asked her to go into the church and arrange some things and mend some vestments that were sadly in need of repair. Later on I went to see how she was getting along with her work, and as I came near to the door I heard the strains of the organ, and as I went nearer there came the soft notes of a wonderful voice. I quietly opened the door and there in the semi-light stillness

sat the little woman at the organ. She was not singing sacred music in the sense the world means. It was a pretty lullaby in Spanish, but sacred to her for every word vibrated on a heart-string. When I saw she was about to finish I carefully withdrew, and the following morning I told her she might have one hour of each day for her music, and that alone seemed to brighten her life."

"Life doesn't ring true," interrupted Merle.

"My son, we must not judge, for perhaps in her case God is preparing a beautiful soul for an exalted life beyond; sorrow, you know, is the great builder of character. Some weeks later I persuaded her to sing at the services. At first she was very timid, but soon overcame that, and not long afterwards came the black day."

He hesitated and seemed to be biting his lips, and a hard expression came to his otherwise mild face. Merle noticed and wondered.

"Can you tell me about that day?" he asked.

"Yes," answered the padre, "but let me have a few moments to calm the bitterness that rises when I think of that day."

In a short time he continued: "One Sunday a strange woman came into the church at the eleven o'clock mass. She was short and fat

and wore a gaudy dress underneath an outer garment, and the lace that covered her hair came down and partly concealed her face, and at first I thought her wearing the mantilla as she did she might be Spanish; but no, she had all the appearance of one from the underworld, for so many of such people when they reach the twilight of life want to come nearer to God. I thought perhaps she had been a keeper of a resort in one of our large cities and had come here for refuge."

As he listened, Merle's thoughts again traveled to Govante Pier and in his mind he saw the woman called "The Woman of Mystery" as she stood holding open her hand-bag so that the young man called by two different names might put into it something he took from his side pocket.

"When the little woman saw her," continued the father, "her face turned ashen, and I noticed her left hand go out and clasp the railing that surrounds the choir, her eyes were like those of a frightened fawn and her voice became soft and low and was never more beautifully tremulous. The strange woman left before the service was over and I have never seen her since."

“Why did you not question your little friend?” asked Merle.

“I had intended to do so, but she stayed in her little house the rest of the day and that night she disappeared.”

“To me that sounds like hypnotism.”

“No; she did not touch her,” quickly answered the father.

“That is not necessary,” said Merle. “Hypnotism can be produced in three different ways. A suggestion can take place unconsciously; that is, hypoconsciously, and there is physical influence of one person on another, but there is only one scientifically assured method of producing hypnotism and that is autosuggestion, for it grabs all the functions of the nervous system. What you tell me of the little woman’s appearance, her lips and the tremulous voice would all suggest that. Father Diaz, please take me back to her little studio; I want to look at that portrait again.”

They slowly walked back to the room that the father held almost sacred. “I wonder,” mused Merle, as he stood gazing at the unfinished picture.

“Father, it is getting late,” he said at last, as he turned away, “and I think I had better

be going for it is quite a little journey to the village where I intend to spend the night."

He hesitated a moment, and Father Diaz noticed the writer's eyes and expression of wonderment when he saw the large rafters that spanned the ceiling and supported the heavy tile roof, for they were dressed but did not look as if by plane or draw-knife. On shelves grimy with age and neglect there were utensils, bows and arrows made of yucca fibre and on the walls hung several dresses made of twisted rabbit skin that had been prepared by the Indian squaws many years ago. Dust had fallen over all and the relics were festooned with cobwebs.

"I was wondering at the odd dressing of these rafters," he said, turning to the father.

The padre laughed and then told him how, in early days, the padres cut the rafters in the mountains many miles away and with the help of the Indians and oxen dragged them down to the building spot, and as they pulled them along the padres would turn them from time to time so the sides would be planed alike, and he told how the tile flagging of the floors was made by the padres and Indians. "The adobe was pressed into shape by hand and then laid out in the sun to dry and harden."

"I will walk with you to the door," said the father; "I want to show you a bed of poppies she planted," and as he spoke he led the way to a lawn where a goat was quietly grazing, and just beyond was a bed of golden poppies. He told Merle the California poppy was the first blossom that attracted the Spaniards who sailed to these shores, "and when they saw fields of this blazing blossom," he said, "they called California 'The Land of Fire,' and they called the flower 'Copa de Oro,' for it resembles a cup of gold."

He told of their going into the hills and finding another flower of the same family, "and they called it 'Mariposa,' " he said, "for its coloring and the shape of its petals are like the wings of a butterfly."

"Father, I would like to stay with you longer, but I must be off for the day is waning," he said, as he took the padre by the hand and bade him good-bye, and he was soon alone on the dusty road.

"How I should love to paint the beauty of this scene," he thought, as he walked along in the evening breeze that mingled with the soft perfume of the flowerage and came like the sound of sobs. From the glow of the setting sun he passed into the shadows of an eucalyptus

grove. They were sometimes purple, then red-gold and at times deep lavender color. "Some day I shall return to this spot and do some sketching."

He was an artist of some note as well as a writer, and was prolific in stories of the more refined side of life. His pen was always in harmony with his brush, and told stories of marvelous tragedy and romance in words that blend in pleasing harmony, and his brush gave the grandeur of nature in tones few artists would dare to use, and here he found material for both. He opened his sketch box that hung from his shoulder and quickly made a few sketches and took some notes of color effects, and then whistling in undertone, passed on down the road.

CHAPTER FIVE

A NIGHT IN A GYPSY CAMP

The moon came from behind the Sierras while the writer passed along the quiet country road, stopping now and then to make observations. He was alone, but not lonesome, for the beauty of the scene and touch of summer breeze—soft as velvet—made him almost boisterous in imagination.

“If I could find that little woman of the mission wandering around here in the stillness and could take her in my arms and comfort her, what a pretty story it would make,” he mused, as he stopped to enjoy the perfume that came from an orange grove at the side of the road. While he stood there in the bright moonlight a wondrous tenor voice came to him from just around a turn in the road:

“Av, my little Romany chel!
Av along with mansar!
Av, my little Romany chel!
Koshto si for Mangue.”

“Gypsies,” he said, and quickly crossed the road and hid in a field of pampa-grass that was

in blossom. Soon a young man and a miss came in sight. "They are lovers out for a stroll," he smiled.

They were dressed in brilliant holiday attire and the young man's arm was around his sweetheart's waist and her head rested on his shoulder as he sang while they slowly walked along.

"They are lovers and will not mind if I have a little fun at their expense," he said almost aloud, and then his clear baritone voice repeated in English the lines of the love song, for he knew their dialect:

"Come along, my little Gypsy girl,
Come along, my little dear;
Come along, my little Gypsy girl—
We'll wander far and near."

The young woman clung tightly to her companion's arm as they stopped to listen. They made a pretty picture as they stood in the bright moon-sweep with an orange grove on one side of the road, and on the other a field of tall white-plumed grass.

"Romanies think spirits come from the ground," she said, in a half whisper as they stood listening, but it was not for long for Merle came quietly from his shelter and slowly walked to where they stood and his eyes were wick-

edly mischievous as he sang the last verse of a Gypsy love song:

“If I were your lover I’d pillow my head
On those tawny breasts of thine;
And I would use as lamps to light my bed,
Those eyes of sapphire shine.”

His friendliness at once awoke an altruistic feeling in the hearts of the lovers and the three young people joined in hearty laughter.

“You must come with us to the feast,” said the maiden, with a winsome smile, as she turned to retrace her steps, and led the way to a sheltered nook where there were several caravans scattered here and there underneath graceful sycamore trees. They were Gypsies of the old order and were celebrating, for a night of each year at a stated time they gave a feast at the full of the moon and sang and danced and told stories from the setting of the sun to the break-o’-day.

As they came near the camp, shouts of merriment were heard. It was a cool night and some wore flaming red cloaks thrown over their shoulders, and others sat on straw around smouldering fires where kettles were boiling. The camp was vibrant with laughter of happy, care-free people as they danced and sang in

their home near the side of the King's Highway.

They received the writer as if he were one of their kin and he heartily joined in the festivities that seemed more like a song service, for everyone sang and danced.

An old woman with shining blue-black hair seemed to be the leader of the group. She intently watched the stranger for a moment and then continued her work of putting the little ones to bed. She led a small "tot" to a seat a short way removed from the gay throng, and as she sat in the shadow, the little one knelt and placed his small hands on her knees. Merle was interested, and without causing attention, moved to where he might hear what she was saying.

"It's the Lord's Prayer," he said to himself, and then in an undertone translated the old woman's dialect as she repeated it, and the little one following as best he could.

"My sweet God, who art there in Heaven,
may thy name come hallowed; may
thy kingdom come hither; may they do
all that thou wishest upon earth, as
in Heaven. Give me today my daily
bread, and forgive me all that I cannot
pay thee, as I shall forgive other

men all that they do not pay me. Do not let me fall into evil desire; but take me out from all wickedness. For thine is the kingdom, thine the power, thine the glory, now and ever. May God help us! May no misfortune happen to me in the road, and may no one steal anything from me."

And when she finished the prayer she took the little fellow in her arms and sang a pretty Gypsy lullaby: "Sleep thee, little tawny boy—," and the words and tones grew softer and softer until at last the wee lids closed and the little one was in slumberland.

"Talk about romance," thought the writer, as he turned to witness a lively dance that was in progress. "How care-free they seem," he mused, as he stood looking on and thought of the prayer the old woman had made and how in the morning some of the band might sally forth to forage anything from a young onion to a horse. "Perhaps they would not think it exactly stealing," he said to himself, "for they call the wide world their home and feel that all therein is partly theirs, and the green sward is their carpet and they will say: 'The green grass grows where the spirits tread, and the blue sky is the roof to our home.'"

A maiden who sat on a divan constructed of boards and straw and covered with a bright colored blanket attracted his attention. Her coal black hair was plaited in the true old-fashioned Gypsy way, and was partly covered with a scarlet silk handkerchief that was folded in Egyptian style; a massive ring of gold was suspended from each ear, and a blue and yellow handkerchief draped over her shoulders, and around her beautiful tanned neck were several strands of red coral that rested upon her tawny bosom that gently rose and fell beneath her bright merino waist that was left open at the neck. She picked the strings of an instrument not unlike that of a guitar, and as she fondled and caressed it, the tones seemed alive and more passionate, as if coming from her quivering lips.

Merle watched her closely for a moment. "I've seen her somewhere," he thought, and then he remembered, and with a happy smile quietly said as he moved close to where she sat:

"I met on the hills a sprightly maid,
Oh! so fair to see;
As she drove her sheep with a winsome song
From the hills to the flowering lea."

Her large, mellow eyes half closed as she listened, and then motioned with her head for

him to come and sit by her side. The old woman gave an indescribable Gypsy look as he made himself comfortable on the improvised divan.

“May I have the little spray of blossoms you wear on the lapel of your coat?” she asked, as she moved closer to him and without waiting for an answer took from his coat a spray of forget-me-not he had picked by the roadside.

“I know a pretty legend of the little flower,” she smiled, and then told how Adam had named all the flowers in the Garden of Eden. “He supposed he had named them all,” she said, “and was trying them to see if they remembered their names, and as he called each name the blossom would nod its head. At last when he thought he had called them all and was about to turn away he heard a small voice: ‘And what am I to be called, Adam?’ ‘I forgot you, my little one,’ he said, ‘but will give you a name we all will remember, for I shall call you forget-me-not.’ ”

Merle held her hand in his as she finished speaking, and looking in her beautiful eyes said: “I have a better memory than Adam.”

Her dark, lustrous eyes smiled, but at first she did not speak. She was a beautiful Gypsy, with fascinating allurements, and there was witchery in the graceful figure and exquisitely

carved ruby lips, as she picked the instrument's strings. Her pretty lips pouted and smiled in turn as Merle lounged on the divan and playfully teased her. They were both at the time of life when sounds of the night send the blood rioting through the veins.

"Come closer," she said, in almost a whisper. "I am lonely; stay and we will walk together."

In the crisp morning air, a time when all nature is smiling, Merle continued his journey, stopping now and then to enjoy a breath of perfume that came from groups of flowers and to listen to the clear notes of song-birds.

CHAPTER SIX

HE NAMED THEM "THE FOOT-HILLS OF HEAVEN"

It was the evening of the day following Merle's return from a visit to Father Diaz, and he leisurely strolled along the ocean promenade that led to the plaza of Govante Pier.

"Aunt Mary is true to her word," he laughed, as he came near the benches where people sat listening to the Italian band. Aunt Mary saw him, and leaning heavily on her staff, came to where he stood.

"I am glad you have returned," was her pleasant greeting; "did you have a wonderful trip?"

"Not exactly wonderful, but interesting," he answered, and then told of his trip back to the coast resort. "And as I came near enough to feel a gentle sea-breeze, I passed through the foot-hills of Hollywood."

"I love Hollywood," interrupted the old woman and there was a sadness in her voice as she spoke, "and often in my rambles and while crossing over the beautiful foot-hills, turn and

look back o'er the mystic moor and on and to the sea and then on beyond sight, and at night I have rested on those same hills and lay watching the lovely stars, the twinkling stars, the forget-me-nots of the angels. The true name," she continued, "is Holywood, for near those hills in the year 1769 Junipero Serra celebrated The Mass of the Holy Wood of the Cross," and she smiled pleasantly when he told of having stood near a bell of El Camino Real that marks the spot. "It was surrounded by grey green moss" he said, "and shaded by a blooming acacia, and close by stands a little ivy-covered church surrounded by flowering shrubs—and while I stood there the Cross on the belfry seemed to say, 'Rest Thou in Me,' and he told how he slowly walked on and passed up a few board steps that led to heavy oak doors that swung on massive iron hinges. "And I sat in the quiet of the little church," he said, "and far back from where two black robed nuns knelt in prayer on a bench that stood in front of an altar over which a scene in cathedral glass depicts the landing of Columbus—it is a quaint little place and all one can see from the main road is a cross that rises above palms and bloom-laden trees and faces the purple mountains that shade in soft gradation in spring-

time's tender beauty. Mountains where are noiseless valleys, and where violets bloom in the shade of trees interwoven with red trumpet vine and where the rhododendron hides and where the sensitive plant open and closes its petals, where song birds nest, and the foot-hills of those mountains I named, 'The Foot-Hills of Heaven.' "

"Quite appropriate," she smiled, "for one can see the 'City of Angels' from those hills."

"I was not thinking of Los Angeles at the time," he answered, as he continued his story: "And I followed around the edge of the amphitheatre until I came to Santa Monica."

"But you did not name that little city," she interrupted, "for two Spanish soldiers did that. Would you like to hear the legend?"

"Yes, tell it to me," he answered, as he led her to one of the benches where they might talk and not disturb those who had come to listen to the music. "I'm gaining some headway," he thought, as he sat down beside her.

"According to tradition," she began, "Santa Monica was reared in cruelty and when quite young she was married to a man of violent temper, and by him she had two sons, and one of them called Augustine would not be baptized into the church but became a heretic and

entered an immoral life. The mother spent the greater part of her time praying for him. He fell desperately sick and came near death's door. He was led to believe his mother's prayers helped him, and he changed his ways and finally became the great Saint Augustine. The two springs in the village were really the means of the place being called Santa Monica, for two Spanish soldiers who were off on a furlough came across the two sparkling springs and one said: 'How much like the tears of the good Santa Monica, for she shed many for her erring son.' "

"It's a pretty legend," he said, encouragingly. "Now Aunt Mary, tell me what, if anything, has happened during my absence."

"How long is it since you returned?"

"I came back yesterday, but was too tired after my long journey on foot to come down here. About twilight I went out on the Palisades and sat on the same old rustic bench where we sat one evening and watched the sun go down. Just as I was entering the park I met the young man people call Larry O'Flynn hurrying along towards the further end of the park. You know here in California we lay aside formality, and many a pleasant acquaintance is made by just casually speaking as we

meet on the highways, so I spoke to him and he stopped. At first he seemed very timid—but gentlemanly, and during our conversation I asked him if he were not an Italian and his answer came quick: ‘No; I am an American.’”

“And he denied being an Italian?” she asked, with much spirit.

“Yes: and the subject seemed to annoy him and he quickly passed on, and shortly after I had been comfortably seated on the bench Zita came up the long flight of steps just as she did the night we sat there.”

“Did you see her that night?” she asked sharply, as with half-closed eyelids she watched him, and her expression seemed to say, “I wonder how much you know?”

“Well, go on,” she said in undertone.

“I’ve got her going,” he thought, and continued: “She walked fast and took the same path she did the night we watched her and she soon disappeared in the shadows of the palms.”

“How was she dressed?”

“That question seems odd coming at this moment,” he answered, “for I took particular notice of the rich lavender velvet gown she wore.”

“Half mourning,” she said, with a cynical smile. “Her husband was buried day before

yesterday and she was weighted down with crepe at the lonesome funeral, and now in twenty-four hours comes a dash of lavender."

"I did not know she had lost her husband. Tell me about it."

She did not answer at once but sat in silence, and he saw by her expression something out of the ordinary was annoying her. He noticed she was in a frame of mind half bitter and encouraged her to talk. "I'll get something now," he thought, as he made an attempt at joviality. "Come, tell me about it," he laughed, and patted her withered hand that rested on her knee. "Have you got a good joke for me?"

"A joke," she repeated, as she looked up to his smiling face; "no, it is not a joke—it's a tragedy," and she told how Zita's husband had died in "Salvation Nell's" arms. "And it was 'Salvation Nell,'" she continued, "who did everything, for she had no woman friend excepting Madame Tommasino," and as she spoke her eyes again half closed, "and I guess Larry O'Flynn is her only man friend."

"Tell me," interrupted Merle; "who is this Madame Tommasino?"

She spoke slow and low as she answered his question: "She is the short, fat woman who dodges in and out amongst the crowd and the

people call her 'The Woman of Mystery' for she seldom stops to speak to anybody."

"If they were Zita's only friends, why were they not with her?"

The old woman's frail shoulders shrugged as she answered the question: "Like fair weather friends who reckon only in the name, or should I say cowards, for they both had wronged the dead man and were afraid to face enquiring eyes; but about four hours after the funeral Larry O'Flynn was seen passing up an alley and opening a gate where a path led to the back door of Zita's bungalow."

"And these two did not attend the funeral?" he asked.

"No; it was a lonesome funeral, and on the way to the little cemetery the widow sat between 'Salvation Nell' and an old man from the far North who is down here doing settlement work. He is a kindly old soul and when he heard 'Salvation Nell's' story he went with her to see what he could do for the woman, for she was entirely alone. He is from a country where the heart is big and a helping hand goes out wherever it is needed. I stood in the shadow of a doorway and watched a few men bear the casket to the hearse, and resting on the top of the coffin was a long cross of violets—a message

of love from the bereaved widow," and a sardonic smile passed over the old face as she spoke.

"The old lady has a deep sense of humor," mused Merle, as he listened while she told of the cross and deep mourning worn by the widow.

"The cross was made the length of the casket," she said, with a tinge of bitterness, "and, of course, was out of proportion."

"A symbol of warped affection," interrupted Merle.

"He was a splendid man, but when the truth was forced upon him he tried to drown his sorrow in drink, but it was too great to down, and he sank under the burden until at last he died alone in the arms of 'Salvation Nell,' and while the undertakers were preparing the body for burial, Zita was on the Promenade with Larry O'Flynn." She hesitated a moment. "I am drifting from the subject of the funeral."

"What you tell me is sad—but interesting," he said, with a desire not to interrupt her.

She did not reply to his words.

"A little while after the funeral I was on the concrete walk by the ocean, and as I passed a restaurant I glanced in at one of the windows and there sat the widow between 'Salvation

Nell' and the old man from the North; she was drowning her sorrow and breaking her fast and looked very comfortable behind a plate of ham and eggs. The old man was a kind and benevolent old fellow and often helped 'Salvation Nell' in her work. One day I saw him carrying a pail of steaming hot macaroni and beside him walked 'Salvation Nell' with her arms full of tempting things for an Italian family who live back on the hill. The father was desperately sick and the mother, a frail little woman, was taking care of the sick and her large family of little ones, and when 'Salvation Nell' heard of the stricken family she went to them and cooked and helped nurse the father back to health. That is just one of her many big-hearted acts. She was never idle and her journeys of mercy took her out not only by day but often in the small hours of night. 'My hours of pleasure,' she used to call them."

While they were talking the young man of two names passed near where they sat. He smiled pleasantly in acknowledgment of a greeting from the writer, and without stopping, went to a place where he stood alone while listening to the music.

He had not been there long before he was joined by the "Woman of Mystery," and soon

they left the plaza and walked down the shore path, a part of the beach few people went for recreation. In this section several cabins were built near the water, and a little further back on a rise of ground, there were some tenements where fishermen and vendors of the pier lived.

Merle noticed the direction in which they went. "I would like to follow them," he thought, "but how am I going to get away?"

He sat for a moment and then turning to Aunt Mary said: "I think I must be going, for I am very tired tonight."

"Please forgive me, Mr. Chapman, for speaking quickly of Zita and Larry; harsh words do not help in this world."

Tears dimmed her eyes as she finished speaking.

"You dear soul; of course, I will forgive you," and he gave her an affectionate pat on the shoulder as he turned away and at a safe distance followed the "Woman of Mystery" and Larry. At any time he was not far from them, for the night was dark and his footsteps could not be heard above the swirl of the water and the voices of the fishermen as they sang folk melodies.

Soon they entered a cabin near where the fishermen were arranging their nets and pre-

paring their boats for an early morning start. They stopped their work and silently watched the old woman and young man as they passed by and did not hear Merle approach.

“Who are those people?” he asked.

With a half surprised expression playing over each face, they looked around at the stranger.

“Do not be frightened,” he laughed; “I am a friend.”

They were a jovial lot, and one with a merry laugh said: “The old dame poses as a retired opera singer,” and with a knowing smile directed to his companions, continued: “And is here telling fortunes just to while away the time in the gentle sea-breeze, and the fellow is called Signor O’Flynn,” and they all laughed at the suggestion of the Irish title, and the one speaking gave a wink of the eye. “The Signor loves to watch the break-o’-day from this particular point and see the mist over the lea rise as if lifting a veil from the beautiful foothills that sparkle like jewels in the morning’s glow.”

“Almost a poet,” jokingly laughed one of the listeners.

“You see, pard,” spoke up another who was

spreading a net while listening, "living in this atmosphere we take on the poetic."

And with a hearty laugh they again went about their work.

CHAPTER SEVEN

A NIGHT GHOSTS WALK

Heavy clouds of fog rolled in from the sea and hung over the Palisades, and through the mist came the weird call of the "bug-boy": "All-a-board! All-a-board!"

Merle hurried down the trail that led from the crags to the promenade where the cluster lights were dimmed by the vapor and were as weird as the tram-driver's call, and the bell-buoy's doleful sound never seemed as funereal as it did this evening. "Just move along a little," said the boy, as he rang up a fare, "there is room for another—move up, please."

When the last call "All-a-board!" came there was no part of the tram to be seen, and soon a mass of human beings began to slowly move through the fog. It was like a number of people sitting close together on the back of a deep sea turtle, and the speed of the tram would suggest the same, and the small boy named the tram "the bug."

"The sea is heavy tonight," said a passenger, but no response came from the one ad-

dressed, so he turned up his coat collar and sat in silence.

As they came near Govante Pier, Merle did not hear the customary sound of the band. "Is there to be no music tonight?" he asked of the driver.

"Oh, yes"; answered the boy, "the band plays in the dance pavilion on nights like this."

The writer held his cloak closer around his body and walked on down the pier in the direction of the pavilion. "It is like fairyland," he mused, "or should I say the mystic land that lies towards the borders. No," he smiled, "I'll make it a fairyland, and I will have elfins flit by and fairies dance while waving a golden wand."

He slowly walked on a few steps and then stopped quickly to listen, and he heard through the mist: "All-a-board! All-a-board for Santa Monica! It's the last call!" and as he listened, the sound of the voice died in the distance. The mist forming into pearl-like drops hung from gaudy show-signs and overhanging wires, and in the glare of the lights sparkled like jewels.

"Oh, what a mysterious night," he thought. "It's a night ghosts walk and there seems to be a strife for supremacy between romance and tragedy."

When he reached the pavilion he did not go in. "It's too stuffy in there," he said in undertone, "and the night is too intensely interesting outside," and he continued his walk towards the end of the pier that was twisting and groaning as the swirl of the water pressed against the piling, and there seemed to be a story in the swish of the spray.

There stood a figure in dim outline leaning against the railing at the extreme end of the pier where once he had seen Aunt Mary stand in the deep shadows of night.

"Can it be possible she is here all alone in this dampness?" he said to himself, as he hurried on, and when but a few steps from the spot he stopped suddenly. "It's a man," he said, almost aloud, for at the sound of footsteps Larry O'Flynn had turned and faced him. There were no words spoken for a moment, and Larry was the first to break the silence.

"I often come here at night and listen to the breakers dash against the pier, but I am too cowardly to plunge in."

"Why plunge in?" asked Merle, trying hard to conceal his surprise.

"I am no good to the world, and have never been given a place in it," he said bitterly. "My father committed suicide here, but he had more

nerve than I have." He hesitated a moment, and then with a cruel curl of the upper lip, said: "I hate his memory anyway," and as he looked up his expression showed that he wished he had not spoken so hastily.

"Young man," said Merle, as he took him by the arm, "is there anything I can do to make you see life in a different light, for one's body should be a garden where love and kind thoughts bloom, and we can—if we will—radiate sunshine wherever we go."

The writer's friendliness won the young man's confidence, and he looked around as if searching for some place where they might sit down.

Merle noticed and quickly said: "Suppose we go to some quiet spot and talk it over," and he led the way to a place where soft drinks were served and there were nooks here and there where small tables stood. "This is cozy," he suggested, as they took seats in a nook close by a window where they could look out and see the mystic lights of the pier.

"Mr. Chapman, you are the first man who has ever shown a kindly interest in me, and you know—" he hesitated and smiled sadly, "it is human nature to crave the friendship of someone in whom we deem we can confide. I was

born into the world without a name, and alone I have wandered without a true friend."

"I notice you have one friend," said Merle, watching him closely as he spoke.

"Whom do you mean?" he asked quickly, and with some resentment showing in his voice. "The old woman called Madame Tommasino?"

"Coming fast," thought Merle, as he said: "No, Zita"; but he did not mean the words he spoke.

The young man's eyelids closed, and he bit his lips, but only for a moment.

"I married her today," he said, without looking up.

"You married her today!" It was more than the writer had expected to hear, and he could not keep from showing surprise. "Why, her husband has only been dead several days, and she is much older than you!"

"I know that, but Madame Tommasino suggested it," and as he spoke his face flushed and he hung his head, "and I did as she suggested."

"A weak character," thought Merle, "and I believe, another case of the criminal use of hypnotism."

"And while doing so," continued the young man, "I felt that it was but another coil the woman was winding about me."

He sat gazing into space for some time before again speaking, and then turning to Merle, said in uncertain tones: "I thought at first you meant the Madame was my friend." He moved his head slowly from side to side as he continued: "I am her slave, and have been for some time past."

"Do you feel that you could confide in me?" asked the writer, carefully feeling his way.

"I am about at the breaking point," he answered, while wringing his hands, "and must talk with some one. I have never told the story of my life to anyone, but it was stolen from me and in some way it fell into the hands of Madame Tommasino and she has used it for her purpose," and as he finished speaking and sat with down-cast eyes, he seemed but a boy and his features were as effeminate as a girl's.

"I would rather study a character like his when he is silent," mused Merle, "for speech conceals his real thoughts."

For some little time neither one spoke.

"Is there no way by which you can rid yourself of her," earnestly asked Merle, for he found himself becoming more interested in the boy than just looking for a story.

"No," came the quick answer. "When she is near me I experience a most peculiar sensa-

tion, and am powerless to combat any suggestion she may make.”

“Auto-suggestion,” said the writer to himself, as he watched the pale face of the young man and encouraged him to talk.

“When I was eighteen years of age,” he said in beginning his story, and then he told how from infancy to that age he had lived with Mr. and Mrs. O’Flynn, whom he thought were his parents.

“They gave me a good education, and I was considered an accomplished violinist,” he said, “and Mrs. O’Flynn showered much affection upon me, for she did not know I was not her own son. It was O’Flynn who was the criminal,” he stopped speaking for his voice trembled with bitterness, but only for a short time.

“I was eighteen years of age when the awful truth was told me. A woman whom I thought was my aunt, a sister of Mr. O’Flynn, lay dying and I was told to stay in the room with her until she breathed her last, for the O’Flynnns were afraid of death. Only a boy in experience, but I felt that dissolution was near at hand. When I closed the door, she looked steadily at me for awhile and then back at the door. ‘Where is my brother?’ she asked feebly, and when I told her he was in the house but would not be in the

room, tears came to her eyes and her voice was hardly audible: 'And I am to be left alone to die?' she asked, with trembling lips. I told her she would not be alone, for I would stay with her to the last, and when I called her aunt, her eyes protruded and she looked at me with a wild stare: 'I am not your aunt,' she said with a feeble voice, and motioned to me to come near her bed. 'Go to my dresser,' she whispered, 'and bring to me a sealed envelope you will find underneath the lining paper of the top drawer.'

"I did as she requested and her eyes followed every movement I made, and when I handed the envelope to her she said in almost a whisper: 'Yes, that is it,' and while speaking, she turned her eyes towards the door as if frightened, and then back to me. 'Put it in your pocket, quickly.' She was quiet for a moment, and then with feeble voice, continued: 'I have had it written for some time; I could not rest until I did it, and it will tell you my story and who you are.'

"She placed her trembling hand on my arm. 'Put it in your pocket,' she whispered, 'where it will be safe, and then her eyes were appealing as she said: 'Arturo, forgive me for what I have done.'

"I did not at the time understand why she called me Arturo, but I do now, and as I stood

watching her the eyes gradually lost expression and I knew all was over."

"And you lost that envelope," said Merle, in a voice of surprise and almost disgust.

"No; I did not lose it. After I recovered from the shock its contents gave me, I went to Los Angeles and had two typewritten copies made for fear something might happen to the original. I keep the original right here in the inside pocket of my vest."

At these words the writer's expression changed to one of satisfaction, and it was with difficulty he kept from showing his curiosity to see the document.

"After the funeral I gave one copy to the O'Flynn's, and they do not know but what it was the original, and oh! what a commotion there was in the family. Mrs. O'Flynn became hysterical to an extent bordering on insanity, and at first would not believe the story, but O'Flynn soon settled the matter by making a confession of his guilt, and after that they destroyed the document thinking we three were the only ones who knew of the crime, and Mrs. O'Flynn said: 'We will go on living just as we always have,' and they threatened to kill me if I should ever tell the story."

"Then you lost the other copy?"

"Yes"; he answered, and there was guilt written on his face as he spoke, for he was ashamed to tell where he had lost it.

"I wonder if I dare take a chance," thought Merle, "and ask to see the original." He speculated much while the young man sat in silence.

"I scarcely know what to say for advice," he said, carefully feeling his way, "for I do not know the story."

The young man's expression had changed and was sad, but honest, as his eyes met Merle's steady gaze.

"I am going to show it to you," and as he spoke he took from his pocket a much soiled and worn envelope that was sealed.

"This seal has not been broken since the paper was put in the envelope."

"Perhaps he is fooled," thought Merle, as he watched the man; "some thief may have removed it and placed a new seal where the old one had been," and it seemed to him the boy was slow in unfolding a paper that was carefully wrapped around a small oval photograph. The bit of card-board fell to the floor and the writer quickly stooped and picked it up, and to his surprise, the young man did not reach out his hand for the card, but carefully smoothed out the creased paper.

When Merle glanced at the oval card-board he held in his hand, he gave a start and then looked intently at the young man and then back again at the picture, and all this time the boy did not speak, but his eyes showed much interest in the writer's surprised expression as his mind traveled from the young man's face to the unfinished picture that stood on an easel in the little studio of the old Mission where he had made a visit to Father Diaz.

They sat for some time in intense silence, for Merle's mind was far away, and he was repeating to himself the line he had seen written on the smooth surface of the easel that showed just above the picture:

“In the desert a fountain is springing,
In the wide waste there still is a tree,
And a bird in the solitude singing,
Which speaks to my spirit of thee.”

The young man broke the silence, and his voice was low as he handed the paper to Merle.

“Read this,” he said, in undertone, and as he spoke he looked around to see if there was anyone near enough to hear. “Mr. Chapman, I will listen while you read Annie O’Flynn’s confession.”

CHAPTER EIGHT

THE CONFESSION

The sound of the breakers dashing against the rocks was like cannonading.

"The storm seems to be increasing," said Merle, as he nervously took the paper from the young man's hand. The wind outside moaned and moaned, while the swish of the water almost reached the rows of sea-gulls sleeping on timbers that extended out from the pier.

"Read it," again suggested the young man. "A night like this frightens me and I want something doing."

"A sad state of mind for one's wedding night," mused Merle, as he began to read the document that was in the form of a letter. It was dated and addressed to Arturo Bonino.

"I hardly know how to begin this," Merle read, and then stopped a moment and watched the boy's expression change from a mild, appealing look to one of hate.

As they sat in silence, the writer glanced out of the window and saw Aunt Mary coming from the end of the pier, and as he watched her she turned her head, as if drawn by a magnet, to

the window near where they sat, but her eyes did not turn to him, for they seemed riveted on the boy who sat on the opposite side of the small table.

“Do you know her?” he asked the writer.

“I have often seen her as she stands gazing at you,” Merle answered evasively.

“Yes; she hardly ever comes my way but what she stops and watches me for awhile, and then passes on.”

Merle did not wish to tell of his meeting with the old woman, for he wanted the boy to talk, but all he said was: “Please go on,” and Merle continued to read:

“I am not going to ask forgiveness for anything I have done—God knows I have repented; but perhaps I am old and realize my last hour is near at hand. Perhaps if I could have stayed young and beautiful I would have remained reckless—who knows; therefore I am not going to be a hypocrite at the last hour. I have wanted, oh! so often, to tell you many things, but have been too cowardly, and now as I write them there is too much fear and remorse in me to face you. Perhaps I would not suffer so intensely if I knew where and how your mother is; she was so beautiful and frail like a dainty orchid.”

Merle stopped reading and looked to where the boy sat with tear-dimmed eyes. He did not speak to the young man, but continued his reading:

“Late one night an Italian violinist, a handsome young fellow and a musician of note, brought her to my house—a place in the underworld—and he gave me a letter from my brother who owned the building, and in that letter he wrote, ‘Bonino is a friend of mine, but in hard luck; take the girl in and care for her and I will see you later.’ She was a beautiful girl of Spanish birth, and Bonino loved her dearly.

“Let me make a few comments,” said the writer, as he stopped reading and laid the paper on the table before him. “Let me tell you, Arturo,” and as he noticed the boy’s surprised expression, he said in way of explanation: “I call you by that name for it is the name used in addressing the communication, and perhaps your mother gave it to you. She says in this confession: ‘Bonino loved her dearly.’ That statement is absolutely false, for there is not a man living who will wrong the woman he loves. Love is spiritual, and the true woman would tear open her breast to warm the heart of the man she loves, and that

man would go through fire and hell to protect her. Arturo, these are words it would be well for you to remember during your journey through life," and as he spoke these words he took up the paper and continued to read: "And she in turn placed her whole faith in him—a weak, temperamental character. A few days later a little boy was born into the world. About the same time a child was born to my brother and his wife. Two months later my sister-in-law was called east on account of the serious illness of her mother, and the child was placed in my care. She was away for several months, and during that time the child died. I found it dead one morning. In some unaccountable way, the bedding had fallen over its face and smothered it to death. My brother was afraid of the consequence of a disclosure to his wife, so after much bartering, he persuaded the Italian to sell him his baby and supplanted it in the place his own child's death had left vacant, and you—instead of being the child of Dennis O'Flynn—you are the son of the noted violinist, Albert Bonino. When Bonino saw the terror in the eyes of the young mother when he told her the child had been taken away, remorse drove him to the end of Govante Pier where he committed suicide by

plunging into the breakers that dash against the rocks, and after that we swore your mother's liberty away, and she was placed in an asylum, and after a few years' confinement there, she escaped from the institution and has never been heard from since. The small, oval photograph I enclose in this is a picture of your father." The document was signed Annie O'Flynn.

"Mr. Chapman, that is all I know of my parentage, and I am going to tell you how hard I tried to locate my mother."

"Some day you will see your mother, and your souls will blend like the meeting of waters," said the writer, without raising his eyes to where the boy sat.

"Life is hard," he said to himself, without changing position or looking up, "but I believe he will meet it if I can rouse him to the meaning or value of it all. He is only one of many unfortunates of this type. A curse not brought on by himself. It lies with me to teach him to see life in a different aspect."

CHAPTER NINE

HE TELLS OF HIS WANDERINGS

The young man consulted his watch when the last of the merry-makers were leaving the room.

"You know this is my wedding night," he said, and his voice was full of sarcasm as he spoke, "and we are going to spend our honeymoon with the Madame."

"At her little house?" asked Merle in much surprise, for the place looked so unromantic as it stood on the sands near the surf, and near the cabins of some fishermen who spent the hours of grey dawn in their boats, and as the sun rode through the heavens, they came ashore and spread thin brown nets on the drifted sands, and while the cords were drying, sang fisherman songs, smoked strong pipes, and lounged in the shadows of sea-gulls flying.

"And the bride," he smiled bitterly, "may be awaiting the coming of the groom."

"It is not so very late," suggested the writer, for he was anxious to get the rest of the

story while the young man was in a talkative mood.

“I know it is not, and I am going to stay and talk with you, and tell you of my years of wandering, and of the fruitless search for my mother. After Annie O’Flynn’s disclosure, life at the O’Flynn home was unbearable. Mr. O’Flynn felt bitter towards me for disclosing his guilt, and his wife’s attitude changed from that of a loving mother to a sweetheart, and she wanted to use me as a means to punish her husband, and the situation became vile; so one night after all was quiet, with only my violin and a small valise in which I had put some necessities, I left their home. I had let my hair grow long, and dressed as I thought my father looked, and all the time I had my mother in mind and thought if she were alive and saw me, she might think I was her son and in some way make herself known to me.

“Mr. Chapman, to this day, I watch every woman who comes to the plaza, and when one hesitates and looks at me inquiringly, my heart bounds, only to settle back and ache and ache as they quietly pass on.”

And he told how he had gone from town to town in search of work in places where many people of all classes gathered.

“When I left the O’Flynn home, I only had a few dollars, and in a short time I found myself without means.” His face flushed as he continued: “I was proud—I know it was false pride, but I went hungry for a long time, and one night in the first town I stopped at, when I was very faint from hunger, I went into a saloon and stood in the middle of the floor for a short time, and then—faint from the lack of food—sat down on one of the rough benches and began to play. I tell you, Mr. Chapman, the lunch-counter looked pretty good to me when I was playing. The music was unusual for a resort of that type, and my coming to the place as I did interested the loungers and they gathered around to listen. I remember very little what happened after I began to play, for I became dizzy and a haze seemed to pass over everything about me, and then I knew no more until I awoke the following morning in a strange place, a room poorly furnished—but neat, and I soon learned it was the bar-tender’s room, for he lay asleep on the floor beside my bed. My stirring woke him and he was up in a moment to see if there was anything I wanted.”

As Merle listened to the boy’s story of kindness extended to him by a stranger, he said

to himself: "One of the great big hearts found among the class the world wishes to call the common people."

"I had been undressed and put to bed, and while in a state of unconsciousness had been given nourishment, for the man as he smoothed out my bedding said: 'I am going down stairs and make you another egg-nog and you must stay in bed all morning.' He did not ask me any questions."

The writer's smile was happy and one of satisfaction, for he loved to hear of the good deeds of this class of people who live a natural life.

"I could not tell my story anyway if he should have asked, and I was oh, so thankful for his silence on the subject. The town was small and I stayed but a few days," and as he finished speaking he sat for some time quietly looking down at the floor.

"Each hour the case grows more interesting," mused Merle, as he watched the boy.

"I did not know what position in life my mother might be in if she still lived, so I went everywhere I could," he continued, but while speaking did not raise his eyes from the floor. "I was two months traveling from Los Angeles to San Francisco, for I made the journey on

foot. From the town where I first stopped, I went to a fashionable resort and tried hard to get work, but could not. There was a promenade near the water-front where society gathered afternoons and evenings, so I took my violin and played on one of the corners of a street where the greater number of people passed, thinking if my mother was one of the throng she might hear and come to where I stood. I was jostled and sometimes pushed off the side-walk. I do not want to brag, but my music was of a high order. At last a policeman came to me and said: 'Give us a little "rag-time" or else move on. These people don't want your kind of music,' and he pushed me into the street. The second day after that I was arrested for obstructing the walk, and after a night spent in jail I was released upon the promise to leave town."

"No egg-nogs in that bunch," laughed Merle, and his joviality cheered the boy and his story lost much of the sadness and in a way became spirited, but a tinge of bitterness showed now and then.

"At last after varied experiences, I reached San Francisco, and in a few days obtained employment in a music store, and when it was learned I could play the violin I was asked to

play in a church on Sundays, and that gave me some extra money. Soon invitations to social affairs came and I was asked to play at recitals. Among the customers who came to the store was Madame Tommasino, and that is where I first met her."

"And she has been in your life ever since?"

"Yes," was all he said, as his eyes again rested on the floor and it was some moments before he spoke. Merle sat quietly watching the fast changing expression of the young man.

"She came often"; he hesitated again and his flushed face was a study to the writer, for he saw fear and shame written there.

"The men clerks in the store warned me but I did not understand, for I knew little of life in those days."

"The knowledge you have gained since," said Merle, "will not hurt you, for to know life makes a firm and safer foundation for a character. You told me the story of your life fell into the hands of this woman Tommasino," and the writer remembered having noticed the shame on the boy's face when making the statement, and he said to himself: "Father Diaz's suspicion was correct."

"Yes"; was all the answer the young man gave.

“Was she ever acquainted with Mr. O’Flynn?”

“Yes; they are friends of long standing, but Mrs. O’Flynn detests her. I did not know all this in San Francisco, nor did she know who I was until—” and he stopped suddenly and sat with downcast eyes.

“I think I have a pretty good line on the ‘Woman of Mystery,’” mused Merle, as he waited for the boy to continue his story.

“I was lavishly entertained by society—” (“A new plaything—a fad,” mused Merle, as he sat quietly listening) “and my work in the church was pleasant, and the business in the store was steadily increasing, and life began to look brighter, but it lasted only a few months. I first noticed a change in the people who were known as the society people of the city, for invitations became few, and then at the recitals there was a coolness I did not understand. The applause after a number was all one could wish for, but when I circulated amongst the gathering there seemed to be a something, I could not tell what, but the atmosphere was changed, and there was something wrong and a feeling of loneliness came over me. No one came to take me by the hand, and when I crossed the room to speak with someone who

had professed friendship I would find them preoccupied, and it was a back I met instead of a smiling face."

Merle's eyes half closed as he sat listening and speculating in his mind as to the cause of the change. "I could almost guess," he smiled to himself. "The work of the 'Woman of Mystery,' " and then he asked the boy if the woman Tommasino had ever threatened him and he answered in the affirmative, and then was silent until urged by the writer to tell all.

"Give me the whole story," urged Merle, "and perhaps I can help you with a few suggestions," but the young man, without looking up, slowly shook his head.

"No; I have been a flat failure and must accept it all."

Merle spoke quickly and with much spirit: "But you have not been a failure; you have been stumbling over stumps and passing through tangles of weeds where vipers breed, and you have been where a wonderful garden could be made if you would root out the stumps and dig up the weeds and let in the rays of sunshine that would soon drive out the vipers, for they are cowardly when light is thrown on them. Cowardice is the worst curse we have in the world, so do not be a coward."

The boy looked up and there was an expression of surprise on his face, and he continued to tell of his experiences with these people.

"And some of those same women came to the store and invited me to suppers and moonlight strolls in the parks."

"But not as dignified upon such occasions," interrupted the writer, with a smile of understanding that would come only from a man who knew life.

"No; they were not," he answered, as his face crimsoned.

"A case of 'Come into my parlor, said the spider to the fly,' " smiled Merle, and as he spoke there was a twinkle in the eye. "Did the little boy's feet get tangled?" he again smiled teasingly, but there was no response from the young man, and with serious thoughts he continued his story:

"My greatest disappointment came when the pastor of the church where I was playing came to me one Sunday and asked me to see him after the evening service. I noticed a change in his expression and there was a coldness in his voice. There was no trace of the kindness of former days and I did not understand. I went to his study after the congregation had been dismissed and found him

in an indignant frame of mind. I did not know the cause, nor did he speak for some little while. After he had walked up and down the floor for some time, he turned to his desk and took a paper from one of the compartments, and without saying a word, handed it to me to read. Mr. Chapman, it was a type-written copy of Annie O'Flynn's confession. He watched me while I read it and his voice was harsh and cold when he asked if it were true. His voice, and the ungodliness it carried with it, gave me courage to meet the embarrassing situation, and I merely answered, 'Yes,' and then waited for him to continue.

" 'Do you realize,' he said, as he turned and faced me, 'that my congregation is one of the most exclusive in San Francisco?'"

"I answered his question, but only with a bitter smile.

" 'How long do you suppose I would hold my position if it were found out that I employed an illegitimate person to furnish music in this house of God? They would not tolerate such a thing for a moment.' "

"What a splendid experience," thought Merle, as he listened. "Learning life and the hypocrisy of it all."

"Something gave me wonderful strength,"

continued the boy, "and I rose quickly from my chair, and said as I passed him and moved towards the door: 'I do not believe God knows you and your congregation exist,' and I slammed the door before he recovered from his surprise."

"Tell me again," asked Merle, "did this woman Tommasino ever threaten you?"

"Yes," he quietly answered, "and she said she knew where my mother was and threatened to divulge her hiding place and have her again committed to the asylum if I did not do her bidding, and the threat and her peculiar influence held me as her slave. She had many acquaintances from the four hundred, and that perhaps is how my story became known in that set; but she must have deliberately sent the confession to the minister, for it was an exact copy, and soon I was not spoken of as Signor Bonino, but as the illegitimate son of Albert Bonino, the great violinist, and many veiled stories were told, and that seemed to draw more people to hear me play. My father was looked upon as a great genius. He had many follies I learned, and I soon knew this class of women liked him for that."

"Yes," interrupted Merle, and as he spoke his voice had in it a tinge of bitterness and it was some moments before he again spoke, and the

young man sat quietly wondering what his thoughts were.

"Mr. Chapman," Arturo said as he looked straight into Merle's eyes, and the writer saw truth in those eyes, "I was a good boy until I reached San Francisco."

"I do not doubt it," answered Merle. "You unfortunately landed in a 'bunch' who know better how to raise pedigreed dogs than children, and a class of women who hardly know how to think beyond a few orchids pinned on the bosom of a gown as daring as the law allows."

"Yes, I noticed that, but I was lonesome and weak and I learned of so much society tragedy, for many of the women of those exclusive sets would come to the music store to see me and arrange for clandestine meetings."

"And the handsome young violinist fell for it," said the writer, in knowing amusement.

"Yes," the young man answered, in almost a whisper, as he sat with downcast eyes, "and I drifted down and down until I landed in 'Rag Alley' Chinatown, where 'Chinks' swarmed like weevils in a grain bin. I smoked opium, and God only knows what I did not do. Hungry and friendless at last I drifted back here, and Madame Tommasino followed me, and has followed me ever since. I was desperate then and willing to return to the O'Flynnns and

accept conditions as they were, for I was hungry. My feet were almost bare and my clothes unkept. I avoided the highways and slept in clumps of chaparral, and I could get food in saloons by playing for the loungers."

He stopped suddenly, and with a wild stare looked towards the window, and Merle turned and looked in the same direction, and through the fog that rolled and dipped, there came to the window the "Woman of Mystery." Her small eyes, that shone like those of a snake in the dark, looked past Merle to where the young man sat. The dampness had caused her hair to fall in disorder over her forehead, and as she raised her long, thin hand to push back the locks her fingers caught in the meshes of the damp lace that hung heavy on her hair and pulled it over her face, and she turned quickly from the window, and when the writer looked to where the boy had been sitting, he found the chair was empty, and he just caught a glimpse of the young fellow passing out of the door where he joined the old woman, and soon they disappeared in the mistlike fog.

"A heavy shock will be necessary to break the spell she has thrown around him," said the writer, half aloud, as he again turned from the window.

CHAPTER TEN

A DANCE OF ALL NATIONS

Merle was the last to leave the little haunt where he and the young man sat talking. The man in charge of the attractive place was proprietor and waiter, for it was his concession and he did all the work and had just begun to put up the board shutters at the windows.

"Stranger," he said to Merle, as he noticed the writer examining the attractive furniture made out of eucalyptus wood, "it's pretty, isn't it? and notice how the pearl grey tones blend with the shades of the red-wood fixtures."

"It certainly is truly Californian," answered Merle, as he moved towards the door.

"I judge you are a stranger," said the man, as he continued his work. "I would not hurry to close, but this is to be a gala night and I am to sing at the festival."

He then told how one night of each year was set aside for a feast and dance for all who held concessions and their friends, and how the corporation who owned the pier gave the use of the

public dance hall and paid the Italian band for playing.

“It surely is a dance of all nations,” he laughed, “for everybody will be there. How would you like to go?” he asked. “I have no one to take, and would like to have you go with me. I could not be with you much, for I am to sing. After each dance there is a song and dance of some one Nation, and then a selection from the band. You would enjoy it, I think, and once in awhile I could drop around and chat with you.”

Merle was a Bohemian in every sense and always glad to come in touch with interesting characters, and he eagerly accepted the invitation.

The wind was growing louder and driving the fog away as they left the little cafe, and it wailed and increased as they entered the dance pavilion. As they passed through the door, the writer took the young Spaniard by the arm to hold him back, and with a smile playing over his face, said: “Just look at that,” and he pointed to where Aunt Mary sat in the front row of seats that had been placed for the use of spectators.

“Oh, yes,” laughed the concessionaire, “she never misses anything, and let me tell you,

stranger," he continued seriously, as he turned and faced Merle—a habit so characteristic of the foreigner of the far south, for they stop in the middle of the sidewalk or street to explain or argue a matter, "she is wonderfully educated and quite a philosopher in her way."

The statement from the young Spaniard pleased the writer, for it gave him a new suggestion, and he changed his mode of procedure in his attempt to draw her into spirited conversation, and by so doing learn more of her story.

"Her heart is big," continued the young man, "and she and 'Salvation Nell' do more good work in this section than all the other women combined."

"May I sit beside her?" asked Merle, and without waiting for a reply went to where the old woman sat. The breakers pounded furiously, and the building creaked and swayed as he walked over the polished floor.

"You are getting pretty gay, Aunt Mary," he laughed as he took his seat.

As she answered his friendly salutation, he noticed her voice was changed and younger and musical, and her eyes reflective. "It's the environments," he mused, as he listened to her spirited words, and noticed her lively imagi-

nation as she threw off all restraint and took on the atmosphere of the place, and while they sat talking, the hall gradually filled with merry-makers of all nationalities, and soon the band played the opening selection, "La Traviata." Neither one spoke until the last notes died away, and then it was Aunt Mary who broke the silence.

"You are fond of music, aren't you?"

"Yes," he answered, "and I never hear that piece but what I nestle back and dream, and in my dream I wander off to Venice, and under the moonlit heavens—with Verdi as companion—drift noiselessly on the still waters that glisten around the music floats of the Grand Canal, and as we pass beneath the Rialto we call to old Shylock, and in my dream the beautiful Desdemona comes to her balcony and throws me a rose kissed by lips that glow like the warm rays of sunset."

As he spoke, he watched the old face wreath in smiles of appreciation, and the withered hands smooth out the folds in the much worn gown, and then gracefully clasp each other and rest in her lap.

"An aristocrat," he said to himself. "A tragedy." There was silence for some moments.

"I love to hear you speak," she said in breaking that silence, and her smile seemed to say: "Please do not stop."

She sat with all the grace of a stately woman in a wonderful drawing-room. Merle had never seen her like that before, for he had met her only on the Palisades and wandering around, but now she shone in a different light, and he forgot the poor attire and saw nothing but the interesting face, and it seemed to him as if she were his hostess. Soon "jazz" music began and dancers of all nations flocked to the open space, and it was a maze of brilliant colors, for the Italians wore their finery, and the Mexicans—with red-brown skin—were picturesque in their national costumes, and the Spaniards dazzling in the bright colors of the South.

Aunt Mary sat silently looking on, now and then her eyes would follow a dancer, and Merle suspected they were looking for Larry O'Flynn, and without another thought, said: "Did you know Larry O'Flynn was married today?"

She sat like one dazed, and when she spoke again it was slow, and she said: "I do not understand—tell me about it," and all the time she seemed to be trying to control an agitation, but was unsuccessful, for her hands twitched

and her eyes half closed, while her bosom rose and fell in slow breathing. He noticed the change and wished he had not spoken as he did, but now there was no alternative, and he told her of the meeting between himself and the young man, but only spoke of that part of the conversation that touched upon the subject of his marriage. She listened attentively as he spoke, and then slowly shook her head.

"They have been lovers for a long time," she said seriously, and without looking up, "and perhaps he thought it his duty to marry the widow, for he had wronged the husband."

"I am getting something now," thought Merle.

"I do not like to hear you say they were lovers," and as he spoke the old face looked up to his and it was full of resentment, and she lost the mild sympathy of a few moments before, and her words bordered on bitterness as she spoke.

"He was too cowardly to attend the funeral of the man he had wronged, but was seen less than three hours after the funeral going up an alley and turning into a path that led to the newly-made widow's back door," and her voice was cynical as she continued: "He hasn't a dollar, and is willing that Zita should support

him out of the money her husband left. He is ambitious to be known as a great musician, but is on the wrong track. He is lazy, and is willing women should give him pin-money in return for his attentions. The O'Flynn woman dresses him well, but gives him no spending money, and he steals eggs from her hen-coop and gives them to Madame Tommasino."

And as she spoke, the writer remembered the first night he saw him at Govante Pier, and he remembered how he turned and took something from his pocket and then put it in the Madame's handbag, and his eyes twinkled as she continued: "He brings them to the pier and quietly slips them into her handbag while no one is looking, or else he takes them to her house, for that is his loafing place. She was afraid of losing him, so she introduced him to her friend Zita, who is much younger than she," and she laughed a harsh, wicked laugh that surprised him, for he had never seen her give such bitter expression before. "I must again ask you to please forgive me—" ("A little peppery," thought Merle, with much satisfaction. "She will now probably come through with something she is holding back," he mused, as he sat quietly watching her face that was fast changing expression. She did

not speak for some time, and then looked up appealingly to the writer. There were many lines in that face, but they could not wholly obliterate traces of a former beauty.) she said, "for speaking bitterly; I do not like to hurt a person," and tears once more came to her eyes as she sat in silence.

He did forgive her for he more often saw in her movements and acts of grace only those a high-born lady could possess, and her voice at most all times was soft and sad, and seldom a bitter word passed her lips.

It was hardly a place for formal conversation, for free jests and loud laughter filled the air and at times the cannon-like blast of waves dashing against the pier drowned all other sounds, but Merle paid little attention to the surroundings, for he was becoming more and more interested in his old companion. "She goes just about so far," he said to himself, "and is then again the same secretive little woman."

It was at a time the Italian part of the programme was being given, and they sat silently looking on, and the scene was interesting, for some of the costumes were patterned after those of old Roman days. and many wore ornaments that looked as if they might have been

made in Nero's time, for some of the dancers were wealthy and of Italian aristocracy and might well have valuable souvenirs, and others were, oh! so poor; but it was a truly Bohemian affair, for good-fellowship reigned everywhere, and while watching the interesting people Merle's thoughts went back to Rome, and in his dream he visited many of the old familiar places, but quickly came back when the music stopped, and he turned to Aunt Mary and said in all seriousness:

“Do you believe in re-incarnation?”

She was much surprised at the unusual question, and smiled as she replied by asking another: “Do you?”

“Yes,” he said, “and I believe in a life beyond after perfection here. I do not believe God would create us and give us sight to see the beautiful, and a knowledge how to live and love just to afterwards annihilate us.”

“No! No!” she said, with a pleasant smile, and in a few lines of verse gave her version:

“When we meet in fields elysian,
Freed from this world's sorrow and care;
We shall with our spirit vision,
See and know each other there.

“I do not believe that death will sever
All life’s dearest, holiest ties;
Nor that we look farewell forever,
When we close our mortal eyes.”

As he listened, his fingers closed over the frail, old hand that rested on the arm of his chair, for while she spoke she had turned to him with wistful eyes, and unconsciously placed her hand on his chair.

“I knew you had much of the beautiful buried in your heart,” he hesitated a moment, “and there also is much sorrow in that same heart. Why not confide in me?”

In reply she merely moved her head slowly from side to side, and “No” was all she said, and that one word dismissed the subject, and when she again spoke her whole voice and attitude changed to one of great interest in him, and it breathed of sympathy instead of appeal.

“Tell me, Mr. Chapman, why your mind has drifted to such serious thoughts,” and she watched him closely as she spoke.

He did not answer at once, and when he did he told her that while watching the graceful and perfectly at ease manner in which some of the dancers wore the old trappings of ancient Roman days, they must have a slight feeling of a former life—a time when they lived the part

they now were representing. "And then again," he said, as he continued in the serious strain, "I think that two words you spoke in regard to Larry O'Flynn made me think much."

"What were they?" she asked, as she studied him in surprise, and her startled expression seemed to say: "I wonder what he is driving at?"

"Love and ambition," he said, "and I might include infatuation, although you did not speak the word," and then he said no more, but waited for her to take the initiative, for he wished to follow her thoughts, and by so doing be more apt to learn the true situation, but she did not speak and the silence became embarrassing.

The waves pounded against the pier, and the wind outside whistled in wild crescendo, but the merry-makers kept on dancing. Merle shifted uncomfortably in his seat while Aunt Mary sat silently looking on.

"She does not cast a bit of light on the past," he mused, and while he sat speculating she turned to him and said in a quiet voice so that others might not hear:

"Tell me of the two words that bothered you."

She had broken the silence and showed

interest in what he had said, and it pleased him to find her anxious for further conversation.

“Ambition and fascination,” he began, “are often shrouded by the word love, and it is one of the greatest crimes committed against society. Let me give you two illustrations the world has witnessed and which have gone down in history,” and he told her of the doings of Mark Antony and Napoleon.

“The case of Emperor Napoleon is one of the best illustrations of what ambition has done and how far it sometimes leads men and women astray, and how it has led them to their ruin. It was ambition that caused him to put aside Josephine, his Empress, the woman who dearly loved him, and marry Maria Louisa, the Austrian, and from the date of that marriage the fortune of war went against the Corsican and the tricolor of France was trodden in the dust at the battle of Waterloo, and he—like a caged eagle—died in exile within the narrow horizon of ocean-bound Elba, and history tells us of her devotion to the last, for while he was in exile and deserted by the Austrian, and lay dying, Josephine wrote to him and offered to share his exile, and help to comfort him in his misfortunes, and in that letter she wrote: ‘It

remains with you but to say the word and I go.' "

"Yes," said the old woman, as tears again came to her eyes, "Josephine was of my blood and knew how to love."

"Of your blood—?"

"Yes, Mr. Chapman"; and for the first time she spoke without reserve. "I am a creole and my family was one of wealth and influence."

She quickly stopped speaking and fear shone in her dilated eyes. "Come; this is not a place for serious thoughts," she hesitated, and then with a winsome smile said: "Tell me of the other word, and then we will dismiss the serious thoughts," and as he listened, the writer knew why he had been drawn to this old woman whom the stranger at first glance would think a relic of a woman of the street.

"A wonderful old woman with a beautiful mind shielding a great tragedy," he said to himself, as he told her the story of Antony and Cleopatra.

"Perhaps the most wonderful exhibition of what fascination under the cloak of love may do with man or woman, and how far it may control their future is given us by the poet William Haynes Lydell, in his 'Antony and

Cleopatra.' Antony left country, home and army to bask in the sunshine of the smile of the enchantress Cleopatra, and Haynes tells it to us as he lay in her arms dying and realized what it had done for him, he says to her in this language:

'Let not Caesar's servile minion mock the lion thus laid low;

'Twas no foeman's arm that fell him;

'Twas his own that struck the blow.

He who pillowed on thy bosom turned away
from glory's ray;

Him who drunk with thy caresses madly
threw a world away.'

And the poet attempts to dignify the act by the word love; it was not love—it was licentious infatuation, and the romanticist smiles at their doings."

"Can a person love one who does not love them?" she interrupted.

"Yes; and that is one of the greatest of tragedies, and many through ambition and licentiousness take advantage of that condition."

And as he finished speaking, the songs and laughter of the dancers ceased and all was quiet for a moment, and then the brilliant notes of Carmen came to where they sat.

The color scheme changed, and it was now all Spanish. The howling of the winds and

dashing of waves against the pier did not dampen the ardor of a young toreador who came from a side entrance, and Merle recognized in him the concessionaire who had bidden him to the dance. He was in the role of Escamillo, and sang with wonderful effect the "Toreador's Song," and while the clear notes were dying away, four banderilleros—with flaming red cloaks over their shoulders—carried a large rug to the center of the hall, and under the rays of incandescent lights, it shone like waves of fire.

They quickly passed from sight, only to return again with many brilliant banderillas, which they gave to dancers and to some of those in the audience, and Aunt Mary was one of the favored guests and gracefully acknowledged the compliment, and while they were passing around the hall, a lovely signorita, in Spanish colors of the richest hue, came from amongst the throng and barefooted stood on the flaming rug. A smile played over her face and she was like a slender flower as she nodded her head to different ones in the audience.

The music changed and the handsome girl gave a coquettish laugh and toss of the head, and the "Andalusia," the most famous of Spanish dances was on. Her gestures were

chaste and alluring in beauty, and as she glided through the mazes of the dance, her filmy gown waved, and jewel-studded anklets sparkled like glimmering stars. The wearing of anklets was a slight departure from the Spanish, and intensified the beauty of the dance by giving a suggestion of the Orient, and the soft, sweet notes of the song of the merry-makers as they stood looking on, was like an echo to the graceful rhythm of her body that vibrated with the passionate intensity of her people.

An exquisite emotion swept over Merle, and Aunt Mary did not miss seeing the rapturous expression on his face as he leaned forward.

"The joys of youth," she smiled, and quietly looked on as the dancer—in fascinating abandon—swayed to the soft rhythm of the music; soon her arms raised in graceful curves, and with the click of the castanets, her body—like a brilliant flower blown by the winds—began to whirl swifter and swifter, until one saw nothing but a column of rainbow hues that floated into the realms of poetry. A shrill click of the castanets, and the body quickly paused and the silken waves of her drapes sank like slowly falling autumn leaves. She stood in Gypsy-like silence while she removed a wreath of poppies from her raven locks, and with a

wild spirit and witchery in the eyes, threw it to where Merle sat, and then with a merry laugh, swept along with the dance. Her sinuous body, fragile and delicate, swayed for an instant, and then as a bird flies filled with the intensity of life, she glided and whirled, and like a film passing over one's eyes, faded away in the throng.

The throwing of the wreath was a signal for all to join in the dance. Aunt Mary knew the meaning when the merry-makers flocked to where the writer sat, and with a hearty teasing laugh, said: "And you are to be 'Queen of the May,' " and soon with much pleasantry on the part of the dancers, the wreath was placed on Merle's head, and under much protest he was led to the center of the hall, and just at that moment a loud crash came and waves broke over the pier, and the storm was at its wildest.

The dancers clasped one another and rushed through the doors as the lights went out, and huddled together in sheltered places. Merle groped his way through the dark to where Aunt Mary had sat, but when he reached the place the chair was empty.

CHAPTER ELEVEN

SWEPT AWAY IN THE SURF

The night was black, and a wild cry for help was heard above the din of the roaring tempest. Dancers in native costumes rushed wildly along the concrete walk, and at times were drenched by waves dashing over the promenade, and each moment the cry for help increased. Life guards were attempting to launch boats—only to be swept back by a breaker.

A call was sent in for help from the fire department, for word had gone out to the effect that the fishermen's cabins, with that of Madame Tommasino, had been swept into the sea. Soon the shore was lined with people from all walks in life. Merle was anxious about Aunt Mary and pushed his way through the crowd, stopping now and then to inquire if anyone had seen her. It was not necessary to give a description, for everybody knew Aunt Mary, and at last he found her sitting on one of the benches of the promenade and quietly looking on. Her clothing was wet from the spray of salt water that had dashed over the walk.

"Come, Aunt Mary," he said, with much feeling and a desire to protect her from the elements, "let me take you home."

"No," she said, as she looked up and asked him to sit by her side. "I want to wait to see that all is well with the poor souls." And while they were speaking 'Salvation Nell' came to where they sat and in her arms she held a trombone that belonged to one of the musicians who had joined the rescuing party.

"Mr. Chapman, will you hold this?" she said, as she handed him the instrument; "I am going to run home and warm up a pot of spaghetti, for the poor helpers will be exhausted."

"Always doing good and helping in some way," said Aunt Mary, with an affectionate smile, as she looked up at Merle and then turned her head in the direction Nell had gone.

A wild cry from the throng rang out when the searchlight from a man-of-war that was anchored not far out rested for a moment on the cabin of Madame Tommasino that was being tossed about on the waves as if it were a toy house, and then the light slowly searched the surrounding waters, now and then to rest on a life boat or part of a fisherman's cabin, and like a mighty dragon looking for prey with the

glare of fire from its nostrils, slowly moved back searching each black wave until it again rested on Madame Tommasino's cabin that had turned on its side, and in the glare of the light from the man-of-war the forms of Zita and Madame Tommosino were seen clinging to the wave-tossed cabin. The night was black, and the forms of the two women shone distinct and near as the searchlight rested on them.

Another wild cry came from the onlookers as Larry O'Flynn crawled through a window, and with the arm of a chair clasped in his hand, rushed to where Madame Tommasino was clinging to the edge of the roof, and awe spread over the multitude as they saw him raise the piece of chair and strike her over the head, and in an instant tear open the bosom of her dress and take something she had been carrying there and put it in his coat pocket. The struggle was desperate, but soon the "Woman of Mystery" was forced away from the shack that was fast going to pieces, and with a wild cry of despair and rage coming from her lips, her body sank in the turbulent waves.

Merle became much excited as he looked on, and forgetting that there were listeners, said half aloud: "The spell has been broken."

Aunt Mary, with half closed eyelids and

hands tightly clasped, turned to him and said: "Mr. Chapman, I understand your words"; Zita's hands soon relaxed and her body floated away on a mighty wave that partly submerged the cabin; another wave following close in the wake struck the frail house, and when it again appeared in sight, there was nobody to be seen but Larry O'Flynn. A flash of lightning was followed by a sharp peal at first, and then rumbling thunder, and the sky became black; another breaker demolished what remained of the cabin and in a few moments the searchlights were turned off, for all they could find from the man-of-war was what seemed to be a human being holding on to an upturned boat or a piece of one of the shacks. From the boat it could not be reached, so it was left to the rescuers on shore to do the best they could, and before the break-o'-day the winds were at peace with the ocean, and in the calm of grey dawn the sun came over the lea as brightly as in former days, and there was nothing but a few pieces of wreckage quietly floating on the still waters to suggest a tragedy that had taken place.

CHAPTER TWELVE

MOONLIGHT AND THE "AVE MARIA"

Three months had passed since Merle witnessed the tragic storm at sea. He was journeying east, and in the warm twilight passionate and intense in quiet of the glow that spread over the land, he left the perfume of orange blossoms and fascinating colors of flowering shrubs, and entered upon a trail that led across the desert to a camp on the shores of the "Silent River," named thus by the Indians—but by the Spaniards called the Colorado, for its colors are varied and intense and water tumultuous as it plunges over rocks in the canyons of the mountains to sparkle and sing in sheltered nooks and then dance on towards a cataract where with a thundering swirl it dashes over the water-fall and part in spray lands in a gorge far below, and after struggling through ravines it reaches the desert and silently pushes through the sands on its way to the sea. It is like a mammoth snake, for without the sound of a wave or a ripple of waters, it winds its way and seems morose and broken-spirited as it silently drifts, and the desert

Indians call it the "Silent River," and sometimes the "River of Death"; for in places the waters are blood-red and the change from the cerulean blue of the mountains is startling, and in the night in the bright moonsweep is almost unearthly, as in the weird mysterious quiet it silently flows on.

He wore a wide brim sombrero with a leather band, on which was carved a wreath of passion-vine. His riding trousers were of the same color as that of the hat, and he wore high army boots. He was walking, and behind him quietly following was a pack-horse that carried his belongings securely fastened on his back by a diamond cinch.

He was not afraid of the bandits of the desert and chose the cool of the night to make the journey; and then again it was out of the ordinary and at times he loved to get away from the commonplace things of nature and dream unusual dreams. As he walked along, the plaintive call of the night-hawk blended with the cry of the desert wolf, and he often stopped to listen to the weird howl of a coyote as it stood in fine silhouette on a sand-dune in the strange, ethereal light of the moon—that heavenly body that seems to come so near the desolate waste whose mystery no humans know.

The hours passed quickly, and midnight found him slowly walking along a trail that led through low cactus and greasewood and on towards a range of sombre mountains where silent valleys are.

Suddenly he stopped, for in the violet light of the moon he saw a column of smoke rising heavenward. "An Indian camp," he said to himself, as he moved back closer to his horse, who had commenced to sniff the air as they do when scenting danger. He stood intently listening for a moment and his horse was just as interested, for his ears pricked up and with inquiring eyes peered in the same direction his master was looking, and when Merle's hand took hold of his bridle near the bit, he moved his head close as they carefully followed the trail.

"It is strange not to hear a dog bark," thought the writer, as he silently walked along.

They had traveled about a mile when he again stopped, for he heard in the distance what he thought were notes from a stringed instrument.

"Perhaps it is just the witchery of the night," he mused, as he listened. "In the mystery of the desert one's imagination is apt to soar in such moonlight as this," he smiled, "and the heart beat loud and fast," and he

again moved on under stars that seemed so near that he might reach up and touch them, and the whole desert seemed asleep and dreaming, and he thought of the little town of Bethlehem as it slept while the silent stars went by.

"Oh, beautiful! Most beautiful!" he said half aloud, as he walked along, and the horse—as if breathing the mysteriousness of it all—kept close by his side, now and then rubbing his head on his master's shoulder.

"I cannot be mistaken," and he again stopped to listen, and like the breath of a flower, came the soft notes of the "Ave Maria," and they seemed to come from towards a clump of Mesquite trees that grew a distance to the right of the trail.

He tied his horse to a palm close by and stealthily crossed the sands in the direction of the trees, and when he reached the edge of the cluster he crawled on his hands and knees until he came close to several silent forms, but he could not tell whether they were Indians or white men, for in that light they were merely outlines; but he knew the music came from the heart of a white man, and he lay down on his stomach and pulled himself along through the underbrush until he came to an opening, and through it he saw, where the moonbeams rested

on a mound covered with wild heliotrope and yellow waxen blossoms of the cactus, several Indians sitting cross-legged on the sands, and standing close by a Yucca palm was a white man playing on a violin.

He drew back closer in the shadow, and as he listened to the plaintive notes he thought he saw in the face of the bedraggled person the features of Larry O'Flynn. He was not sure and dismissed the thought. "No; how could it be?" he mused. "I saw him fall into the sea."

He crouched in the shadows until he saw the Indians one by one get up and silently walk away, and the white man, whose clothing was ragged and his long hair unkept, turn and enter a little hut that stood at the edge of the clump of Mesquite trees, and when all was quiet he left his hiding place and went to the lonely hut where a suggestion of light came through a piece of tarpaulin that hung where a window was meant to be.

CHAPTER THIRTEEN

IN THE SHADE OF A YUCCA PALM

The writer hesitated as he reached the little hut. There was no door; but like at the window, a piece of tarpaulin hung where a door ought to have been. He listened for a short time, and then quietly pulled aside the hanging just far enough to see through, and then with a start quietly drew back.

"Yes; it is Larry," he said to himself, "but why should he be here?" and then he moved to where he could see through an opening between a piece of board and some straw tied together. He stood for some time watching the bent and bedraggled looking figure sitting alone beside a small table where a lighted candle burned with a doubtful flicker, giving a weird outline to the surroundings.

"For days and weeks I have thought of him as resting on the sands at the bottom of the sea," he mused, as he silently gazed upon the quiet figure that was a picture of despair as he sat with clasped hands, his arms resting on his knees, and his eyes seemed riveted on the sand that was the only floor of the hut. On the table

that was made of a few unplanned boards held up by four sticks driven into the sand, was an unfinished Indian basket and some pieces of orange wood that had pretty little scenes painted on.

“What shall I do?” he thought, as he stood watching the dejected looking figure, but he soon decided, and quietly raised the tarpaulin that hung over the opening intended for a doorway, and as he entered the dimly lighted place the young man looked up with a start, and without asking a question said with trembling words: “I knew they would find me.”

He had not recognized Merle, and only saw in the intruder an officer of the law, for the fear of being apprehended had been uppermost in his mind ever since the tragedy at sea.

“Why do you say that?” asked the writer, and Arturo at once recognized the voice and sprang to his feet and clasped Merle in his arms.

“How did you find me?” and his voice was appealing as he spoke. “I’m afraid; I am afraid of everything—of every sound.”

The writer thought it an opportune time to give him bitter food for reflection. He did not know of the new sorrow the young man was passing through.

“It will do him no harm, and perhaps much

good to assume a severe attitude towards him," and after saying many things that would seem cruel to a weak character, he told in a more friendly manner how from the trail he had heard the music and had tethered his horse and walked and crawled to the spot from which the music came.

"I did not recognize you as you stood playing while leaning against that Yucca palm, but I could see that those who sat around that mound of blossoms were Indians."

"My mother sleeps beneath those flowers," said the young man with trembling lips, and buried his face on Merle's shoulder, and then Merle regretted the harsh words he had spoken.

"Sit down, Arturo, and tell me how you found her," he said, as he led him to the only chair in the hut, and then for a seat for himself, turned an empty box on its side and drew it close to the chair where the young man sat.

"Do they think I murdered Madame Tomasino?" he asked appealingly, as he searched Merle's eyes for an answer.

"No; they think you are dead," he answered, "and those standing on the shore that dreadful night saw the wave break over the frail building and carry her away."

"I could have murdered her that night," said

the listener, "but the elements interfered," and the expression on his face was hard as he spoke. "When the storm was at its wildest," he continued, "and our cabin toppled over into the sea, I was frightened, but was a changed man and had all the savagery in my being of a wild beast, and I could have murdered both Zita and the old woman."

"Why Zita?" interrupted Merle, "for she was your bride of but a few hours." And as he listened to the young man's bitter words, he said to himself: "The crime of hypnotism."

"Through the peculiar influence Madame Tommasino held over me, Zita kept me as her slave while her husband lived," he hesitated for some moments before continuing, "and as I see it now," he said bitterly, "the old woman was not just sure of her power to hold me, so influenced me to marry Zita, for they were friends and she had the same influence over the younger woman. When the storm was most terrible, something seemed to snap within me. Mr. Chapman, when the storm broke over us Madame Tommasino hurriedly placed some papers in the bosom of her dress."

Merle remembered having seen him tear open the bosom of her dress when the cabin rolled and pitched on the tumultuous waves, but did

not say anything for he wanted to hear the young fellow's uninterrupted story.

"And when I tore open the bosom of that same dress, this is what I found," and as he finished speaking he took from his pocket some wrinkled and discolored papers.

"The terrific fright broke the spell," thought Merle, as the young man smoothed out the papers and moved the candle to a place where it gave a stronger light.

"If I could rouse him to the true sense of manhood," he mused, as he sat waiting for Arturo to speak. "He is freed from the hypnotic influence, and it will be well to point out to him the enormity of his crimes," and then he asked in a serious voice: "Do you know what a person is called who allows women to support him?" and as he finished speaking he sat silently watching the shamed face before him.

Arturo did not reply. "He feels keenly," mused Merle, "and there is splendid material in him for a good man," and he was again half sorry he had spoken so harshly. "But it will do him good," he thought, as he changed the subject to the mound of desert flowers in the shadow of the Yucca palm.

"No; read this first," and as he spoke his eyes again rested on the floor.

When Merle took up the stained paper he saw it was the stolen confession of Annie O'Flynn, and he was glad it had fallen into the young man's hands.

"Arturo," he said, and his voice was all sympathy as he placed his hands on his shoulder, "tell me the story of your wanderings from the night of the tragedy at sea up to the present time; also tell me how you escaped in that dreadful sea. I am your friend, and with honesty to back me, I can start you on the right path."

They sat in silence for a few moments before Arturo spoke.

"One day I sat in the protecting shadow of a large boulder and looked down into the Valley of San Fernando where in the distance I could see the semi-ruins of the red tiled mission, and I wanted—" He hesitated again, and with his much worn shoe scraped the sand that was the floor of the hut.

"You wanted what?"

"I wanted to go there for food and protection," and again his eyes rested on the sands at his feet.

"Why did you not go?"

His lips trembled as he answered Merle's question: "No; there is no future for me."

With the sleeve of his coat he brushed away the tears that were fast dimming the tired eyes. "The world has no room for such as me. I must wander alone and perhaps starve here on the desert."

He was not strong physically, and as Merle watched him, he mused while listening: "If he is strong enough in mind and body to bear up for a few months; but if not, the sooner he lies down to his long sleep the better," and as he listened to the young man he thought how much cleaner the boy's heart was than those who turned their backs on him.

"Mr. Chapman, there is a veil that separates me from the rest of the world. Society will not raise it. The women used to come alone and raise it for their own pleasure and then drop it again and pass back to their world."

"You feel that you have been unfairly dealt with," said Merle, "and so do I. You are young and have passed through many dark valleys. Now it rests with you to go into the sunlight. Do not try to enter the life that has been denied you for at times it will be a bitter disappointment and that will injure you and perhaps have a tendency to embitter you,—rise above it all and prepare yourself for that brotherhood in the life beyond death,—that is

denied you in life on this earth." While speaking he noticed a change in Arturo's expression and he was pleased, and while the boy was in that frame of mind repeated a few verses, but prefaced them with a few words:—"Some day we shall know what lies beyond death's sleep, for we all must lie down in that sleep. Everything we love dies." And Arturo sat quietly listening when he told him Death was only a common word, an expression meaning the passing of the soul.

"Death is merely
A short parting with friends;
It's like the soaring of a lark
To realms without end.

"It is only a beautiful transition,
This parting from dear old friends,
Like notes of a great musician
Rising to worlds without end.

"Like leaving a cold winter morning,
And a pall of purple gray,
To the bright sunlight soaring,—
To lands that lie far away.

"To meet and know our invisible helpers,
Who are with us day by day;
Guiding us to that promised shelter,—
A land that lies far away.

“Death—What seems so is transition,—
This life of mortal breath,
Is but a suggestion of the life elysian,
Those portals we call Death.

“This world is but a stopping place
On the road to Elysium;
Here we meet wanderers face to face,
All hoping for life elysian.

“Here we leave the train for a short time;
Just long enough to make observations,—
And gladly when the bell chimes,
We board again and off for Elysium.

“Our eyes may rest upon the setting sun,
Or turn towards the rising moon,—
But we are happy to think our work is done,
And we’re off to the bright light of morn.”

He watched Arturo as he finished the verses and was again pleased.

“I have always longed for a home,” said the boy. “When I was wandering I often watched birds teach their young how to fly and how to look for food, and I wished I had had a place in the world.”

CHAPTER FOURTEEN

THEY TALKED THROUGH THE LONG HOURS OF NIGHT

In the dim candle-light he told how he had hurried to Cahuenga Pass where he turned south into the hills.

“A wave broke over the cabin and it went into pieces,” he said, in launching into the story of his escape and subsequent wanderings. “I was thrown into the water near an upturned fisherman’s boat, and as I clung to it, I drifted far south in the tumult of waves, and at last a heavy breaker threw the boat on the sands. It was in the darkness preceding dawn, and I found myself alone on the beach about a mile below Govante. I hurried to the O’Flynn home, keeping as far away from habitation as I could, and when I reached the house the heavens were just turning grey. I entered through an open window in the rear of the house and quietly made my way to the room I had occupied for some time and got my violin and a change of clothing, and from there made direct for the hills, and ever since my food has been of ber-

ries and roots until I reached here, and when the Indians learned of my mother's sickness, they brought food for both of us, but she was too low to eat."

As Merle sat listening, he thought of how like many wild animals do, he had sought the desert in fear of human beings.

"I was hungry and thirsty and wandering around in the hot sands waiting for death when I came across this little hut, and when I pushed aside the tarpaulin, I saw lying on this place called a bed a frail little woman."

He covered his face with his hands and wept like a child for a few moments.

"She was awake, but delirious," he continued, "and as I went near to where she lay her frail arms reached out to me and she said in a feeble voice hardly above a whisper: 'Albert, I knew you would come.' I drew back when she spoke that name. Mr. Chapman, you remember Annie O'Flynn in her confession said Albert was my father's name. She motioned to me to come near to her, and she placed one of her hands in mine, and with the other pointed about the hut. 'See,' she said, 'my beautiful home,' and then she looked up at me and smiled, and oh! what an angelic face. She put her hand on my head and said: 'Albert; I knew

you would come and share my pretty home with me,' and then she lay back exhausted."

"Many times," said Merle, "visions that precede death from hunger and thirst are full of strange phantasies, and she no doubt thought your father had come to her and that she was living in a palace."

"I looked around for water but I did not find any. I then hurried out to the little clump of Mesquite trees that grew near the cabin and found mistletoe clinging to some of them, and I gave her water from the berries, for I remembered how it had quenched my thirst when I was in the hills," and he told how often he had climbed almost to the top of a tree where he saw white berries hanging and some half hidden by the vivid green leaves. "You know the mistletoe is a parasite, and one is apt to find it growing on any tree." He hesitated a moment before continuing. "The water from the berries revived her and she lay staring at me with wild eyes. 'Who are you?' she asked, and when I told her I was known by some as Arturo Bonino, the son of Albert Bonino, the scene was most pitiful, and when she became calm she told how kind the Indians had been to her and where their camp was, and then again lapsed into unconsciousness.

"I hurried to the Indian camp that lies about a mile away, and when I told my story those big-hearted red people returned with me and stayed to the last. They brought food and water, but it was too late to save my mother, and it was her request that we lay her body away in the sands in the shade of that Yucca palm that stands alone a few feet away, and she asked me to play the 'Ave Maria' when her body was laid in the grave, and during the hours preceding death she often asked me to play the 'Rosary,' and other pieces she said my father used to play."

"Did she tell you anything of her life before she met your father, or her name?"

"No, Mr. Chapman; it is all a blank," and as the writer listened he thought it was just as well.

"For as the world goes now," he mused as he listened, "her relatives would turn their backs on him."

"She gave me this photograph, and as she handed it to me, she said: 'It is a picture of your father. I hid it in the hem of my dress before they took me away,' and she also gave me this necktie, saying it belonged to my father, and this little baby's stocking, she said was one I had worn. These three things she had

folded carefully and sewed them in the hem of her dress, and it was pitiful to see her frail hands as she took out the stitches that held the hem."

"Let me see the dress," suggested Merle, "we may find some clue in that."

"We laid her away in that dress," answered Arturo, slowly, and in almost an undertone, "for it was all she had and it was her request, and during the delirium that preceded death she spoke of it as her robe, and she held my hand right up to the last and called me Albert. The good Indians carried boards on their shoulders from a village on the edge of the desert and made a casket for her, and when that was finished they gathered heliotrope and cactus blossoms to lay on her grave, for she had asked to be buried in the shade of that Yucca palm, and I know the Indians will care for her grave. They told me how they loved her and how she made Coahuilla baskets for a living. 'We sold them for her,' said one, 'and bought food for her, for she never went off the desert,' and they told me how she insisted upon their taking half of the proceeds for helping her."

When Arturo finished speaking, Merle took up the photograph, and with a start and almost

dazed, his thoughts quickly traveled to the little room at the old mission and the half-finished picture on the easel. He laid the bit of cardboard on the little stocking Arturo had laid before him, and then took up the necktie.

"Perhaps this may give us a clue of some sort," he mused, and as he turned it over he found pinned to the back a small piece of paper, and on it was printed the same verse that was written on the easel. Merle concealed his surprise and folded the tie and handed it back to Arturo, who did not know Merle had noticed the lines, and as they sat in silence a mocking-bird sang in the lone palm that grew close by the hut, for this bird loves the moon and stars, and often sings during the night, and wherever there is an oasis in the desert the mocking bird is sure to be found, for he seems to love solitude and he will take his mate far into the desert and there alone raise his little family, and the choice of his home may be a lone palm far removed from any other verdure and far away from the taint of man.

The grey of early morning was blending with the golden glow of the rising sun, and the songster seemed to be welcoming the birth of day, and as he sang the writer repeated half aloud the lines he had read at the old Mission:

“In the desert a fountain is springing,
In the wide waste there still is a tree;
And a bird in solitude singing,
Which speaks to my spirit of thee.”

Arturo was amazed as he listened. “Why, Mr. Chapman; those are the lines pinned to this tie.”

“I have read them before,” was all Merle said, for he wished to keep from the young man all knowledge of his visit to the Mission, for he had planned in his mind what he was going to ask Arturo to do, and that was to go and see Father Diaz.

“I believe if he goes there and learns of the life and kindness of the old padre,” he thought, “it will have a wonderful influence for good if he has the right stuff in him, for sorrow is a great builder of character.”

And after Arturo had promised to go, Merle asked him to meditate much on the journey. “And remember,” he said, “that God made us all of one blood and we should walk hand in hand through this life,” and it was the writer’s desire to have him surrounded with as little as possible of that which would remind him of the past, and he felt what the young man would learn at the Mission and of Father Diaz would be a sorrow that would help him in after life.

“There seems to be no way by which you can learn anything of your parentage excepting that part contained in Annie O’Flynn’s confession, and I am now going to ask you to do something that may at first seem strange to you,” and he told him he would like to have him destroy both the original and copy of that confession.

“But why do that?” asked the young man, in surprise.

“I want this night to be the climax of your life,” answered Merle, “and as the sun comes over yonder mountains I want it to shine on a different man—a new man. There are no things we cannot overcome, and I want to see you start this day on the right path, and as you journey through the remainder of this life, I want you to build arbors of beautiful thoughts—make each morning a new beginning. Keep the wonderful word HOPE before you always for it is the life-blood of the soul. Lay away the past—it is over now, and let each new hour be of your own making. You have a friend in me; be just to that friendship, and walk in the path the friend points out to you and begin the new life now. Yesterday’s wounds will heal themselves, and the scars will soon disappear. Your mother has passed to another life.

Do not think death means the ending of all things—it is only the beginning of life.”

Arturo had sat with bowed head while Merle was speaking, but as he heard these last words he looked up quickly.

“Do you believe what you have just said?”

“Yes,” answered the writer, and then sat silently watching the boy whose brain was in a turmoil. “The alpha of your life was sad and you intensified that sadness by the crimes of your younger days. Let NOW be the beginning of a happy life, and the omega beautiful. Often your feet will grow weary, for sometimes the path will seem hard and tangled with weeds, and when the way seems almost too dreary bear your cross with a smile, for a smile encourages a weak soul and kind words are like manna from heaven.”

While speaking the last few words, Merle noticed Arturo carefully fold the little stocking and necktie around the photograph and put them in his pocket.

“Shall we burn these papers?” asked Merle, and the answer “Yes” came quick, and soon Annie O’Flynn’s confession was in ashes, and Merle knew it was an answer to his appeal.

“Now you are born again,” he said to the young man who stood silently looking on, and

the writer was pleased with what he saw written on the sad young face, and after he told Arturo his plans and where he wanted him to go, and whom he wanted him to see and talk with, he said—with much affection and sympathy:

“My horse is tethered not far away. Let us go to where he is tied. I will give you enough food to last you on your journey. When you have that wrapped up we will go to the Indian camp, for you will want to see them before leaving; and, Arturo, I would suggest that you give the hut to them, for they can use some of the things in their camp.”

Soon they were off in the cool of the morning, and after a short stop at the Indian camp, Merle showed him to the trail that would lead him to the old Mission, and after farewells were exchanged the writer watched Arturo as he followed the trail that led far beyond the great sand dunes.

To the right and to the left stretched the waves of hot sand, and as he stood there he thought how few there were in the world who knew of the odd beauty and life of a desert.

Arturo's step was lithe for he was in a mental condition new to him and he saw a light ahead—a light he had never seen before, and

as he followed the white path he remembered Merle's words: "The sun will be your friend by day and the stars will guide you through the night"; and he hurried on in the direction the trail led, and through field-glasses Merle saw him stop now and then to gather wild flowers that grew beside his path and to wave his hand to where he stood until at last the mystic haze left nothing but a phantom outline moving quickly along.

CHAPTER FIFTEEN

MERLE WRITES TO FATHER DIAZ

Nature seemed drowsy in the stillness of the desert heat of middle day. Merle came to the door of a hut that stood near a spring of clear, cool water that was shaded by the fresh green verdure of the beautiful oasis, and he was listless as he stood looking out to where the sands and sky blend in mystery.

From underneath a motionless, dreaming palm tree a pink-throated lizard flitted into the sunshine, and for an instant stood with raised head and eyes that sparkled like miniature jewels and then as quick as a flash darted over the hot sands where the horn-toad revels, and on to the shade of a cactus.

"I suppose he is well on his way," he said half aloud, as he thought of the tragic life of Arturo.

He stood for a moment and then slowly walked in the direction he had seen several road-runners go. He took his field-glasses from a case that hung by his side and scanned the barren stretch.

"They are hunting for rattlers," he smiled,

as he searched with the aid of his glass the waves of drifted sands until at last his eyes rested on the birds as they circled around a snake lying fast asleep in the warmth of the sun rays. He cautiously walked a little closer and stood watching them as they gathered bits of prickly cactus and laid them in a circle around the snake, and after the wall was complete they roused the sleeping reptile, and with loud calls and spectacular gestures, watched him try and cross the cactus barrier and then turn back in fear of the pricklers, and at last in desperation commit suicide by poisoning himself with his own virus.

And as he stood with the glasses to his eyes he saw the unusual birds take to the trail again, and with raised top-knots and open beak, swiftly run along using their tails as a rudder. Suddenly one darted sideways and chased a lizard over and under boulders, and at last emerged with it in his beak and joined the others as they ran along the trail that led over the sands, and when their shadows were lost in the mirage he went to where the dead snake lay. The color harmony of the snake interested him, for the blending of soft grey, olive, brown and salmon reds glistened like jewels in the sunlight, and he stood for some moments as if

charmed. "There is no blending of color as beautiful as those of the desert rattlesnake," he mused, and then turned and went back to the hut, and in the cool of the sheltering palms wrote a letter to Father Diaz, and in that letter to the old padre he gave a complete outline of the young man's life and told how, after thinking him dead, he had found him alone at the graveside of his mother.

"He has been most everything that is criminal," he wrote, "and feels that the world has denied him the privilege of being good. He did not choose the manner in which he came into the world."

And he told the padre how he had directed the young man to the path that would lead him to the Mission, and how he had asked him to make the whole journey on foot.

"And I asked him to meditate much on the journey, and I feel he will. His name is Arturo, and he is the illegitimate son of Albert Bonino, whom society raved over, but turned their backs on his son who has much greater talent."

He did not tell Father Diaz whom Arturo's mother was, for he knew the padre would see in him a likeness to the unfinished portrait on the easel and understand all.

“Both good and bad instincts are strong,” he wrote, “but the world has developed the latter, while the good in him lies dormant. He has all the love and affection of his mother’s blood, but the cowardice and criminal instinct of his father has been developed to overshadow everything else. Life is wonderful if we choose the right path. He was given a difficult role and has played some of it well, and in that part he has learned life in its fullest, and has laid a foundation for a wonderful career of good if only we can help. Cannot we develop that which his mother gave to him, and in turn give to the world something good? I am turning my face to the East, but shall not say good-bye, just *au revoir*, for I expect to return some day. I am sending Arturo to you to teach, for some do not understand just how to bear the cross.”

He finished the letter and gave it to an Indian runner to mail at the nearest post so it would reach the Mission in advance of Arturo.

CHAPTER SIXTEEN

A FEW YEARS LATER

The afternoon was dreamy on the Palisades—quiet and restful. A stranger slowly walked along one of the paths that led close to the rustic fence that winds its way along the edge of the picturesque crags that look towards the sea. His hair was silvery white, so different from the grey of a few years before when—at the sunset hour—he idly strolled towards an incline that led to the ocean promenade. The expression of his face had changed to that of a mature man of the world, and he seemed not only interested in the people but in the birds and flowers, for he stopped now and then to study an odd bloom or listen to the notes of a song-bird, and to examine century plants growing on the crags and he stopped beside one that was about to bloom, and where an artist sat at his easel, and others were dreaming through the twilight.

He was walking towards that same incline, and many of his thoughts were the same as they were when some years before he stopped in the evening's crimson glow to listen to birds sing and twitter, and watch the flowers fold

their petals as the sun went down. He walked slowly, now and then stopping to watch the different types of people, some walking quietly along the bloom bordered paths, while others sat alone on rustic benches overlooking the sea and far out to where the sky and waters blend, and where at twilight the mystic hues one sees in the ocean waves seem as if it might be the border land of the unexplained beyond. Some sat in their black robes of sorrow; others—eyes were veiled with tears, and some sat alone in the dreadful sense of desolation.

Merle stood silently looking down the long stretch of ocean front of Linda Vista, where many sat in the shadow of dreams. "A wonderful, wonderful title, 'A Beautiful Land of Dreams,' " he mused as he turned and looked down over the crags. "What a startling contrast," he thought, for bathers were making merry in the surf, and not far along the concrete promenade there seemed to be another world full of music and laughter.

He walked slowly to the incline and his nostrils dilated as he smelled the seaweed that came ashore on the mighty waves that broke upon the rocks and partly in foam rolled over the sands and quietly seeped back, leaving shells and small sea-life that gulls feed on.

He had traveled much in foreign lands since his last visit to California, and now he had come again to the Golden West in search of material for a new book and to do some sketching. He was not a fictionist, but a lover of life and the beauty of nature, and to him it was all a wonderful picture, for sounds like sweet tones from an instrument's strings came to him from the waves, and the landscape was always a beautiful blending of colors. As he slowly walked along he stopped now and then to listen to the hearty laughter of children playing on the sands. Teddy bears and dolls were laid aside for the joy of building caves and houses in the sand, and many youngsters, with the spirit of war, were building forts.

He listened to the frolicsome music of the merry-go-round, and stopped at booths where games of chance were played. Barefooted fishermen, with brawny legs and necks, were preparing their boats for an early morning start. He listened to the dashing of water on the pier, and as the shadows grew longer and the riot of delicate colors gave a deeper touch of romance to the surroundings, he walked on in the direction of Govante Pier.

He stood for a few moments in the quiet of the golden afternoon, and then continued his

journey a few yards to where a rustic bench stood facing the sea, and where a group of young boys were making merry in the surf, and standing on the sand near the water was a man who, at first glance, seemed to be a priest watching over the bathers.

He wore a soft wide brim felt hat, and his robe was not unlike that of a priest, and while Merle sat looking with much interest at the happy throng, the stranger came and sat on the bench where he was resting. Neither one spoke or took notice of each other for some time and the writer was the first to break the silence. He had noticed the odd attire of the man who sat beside him, but that was all.

“Are these boys from some school?” he asked, as he pointed to the group of happy young fellows in bathing suits, some lounging on the sand—some plunging into the surf.

“They are boys from the orphanage,” was the only answer to his question, and as he spoke he did not turn his face towards where the writer sat.

The voice of the speaker attracted Merle more than his words, and he quickly looked up to the stranger’s face. The man was intently watching the boys, and Merle had an opportunity to study his face for a few mo-

ments, and each moment he was more positive it was Arturo, although he only had a side view, and at last he placed his hand on the stranger's shoulder and spoke to him.

"Is this Arturo?" was all he said.

When the young man heard his name spoken he turned and at first seemed dazed, and then—without speaking—threw his arms around Merle, and for some time both were silent, and then while still holding fast to his friend's arm, Arturo said, in a tremulous voice:

"I feel that I have met God face to face, for it was you who saved my soul."

"Arturo, we met at the cross-road, and I am glad if I helped you. It was the Great Director working through me. You met him face to face, and he led you to the right trail. We three were alone that night."

"Do you really think God was with us that night?"

He watched Merle as he intently waited for an answer.

"Yes, Arturo; I felt His presence, but you did not understand."

And as the new man still held Merle by the hand, he smiled and said: "I now have a name, for the children call me 'Father Arturo.' "

"What children do you mean?" asked Merle.

"The children from the orphanage," he answered, and pointed to a large brick building back on the hill. "It's a home for children such as I used to be." And then he told of his work in the institution, and how Father Diaz had given him the uniform he wore and asked him to always wear it or one similar.

"I have been here for three years, and am now at the head."

"Tell me about Father Diaz," said Merle, as Arturo finished speaking.

"We laid his body away three years ago."

"In the little cemetery at the Mission?" asked Merle, for he remembered the old padre's wish.

"Yes," answered Arturo, and then again sat in silence until roused by the writer, but before Merle finished his question, he was interrupted by Arturo:

"Mr. Chapman, why did you not tell me of his kindness to my mother?" and as he asked the question, tears came to his eyes.

"I wanted you to see for yourself," and then Arturo told of his journey to the Mission and of Father Diaz' kindness to him, and how he instructed him in the work he was now doing.

"And it was through him I obtained this position. The old padre and I fitted up the little

house near the garden gate—the house where my mother slept—and it is now a resting place for anyone who may come along and wish to lie down for the night. Mr. Chapman, while you are here in the west, will you visit me at the orphanage?”

“I shall be very glad to, for I am very much interested in your work for you are giving up self for the betterment of mankind; a love for humanity and a desire to comfort and lead souls that otherwise might be lost, and in doing so you keep on giving larger and larger in truth and knowledge of life and the love of the beautiful. Am I not right?”

“No; not exactly,” he said, “for I have not given up self; I have entered another world and my happiest hours are those spent in leading some wandering soul from the path that leads through Gethsemane.”

As they sat talking, Merle’s attention was directed to a feeble old woman coming towards them. Arturo’s eyes followed in the direction Merle was looking, and with a sad smile, said:

“That is Aunt Mary. I am told her mind failed rapidly after that dreadful tragedy at sea, and when I came here to open the orphanage, I found her in court being tried for insanity. ‘Salvation Nell’ had cared for her

many months before I came back but ill health compelled her to give up the task,—if one may call it that—I am sure she would say ‘An act of pleasure’ for that has been her life for years—doing for others. When she saw me in the court-room, she broke away from the bailiff and threw herself in my arms, and at the same time repeatedly called me ‘Albert,’ and I at once knew she was another of my father’s victims, and I remembered the many odd things she used to do years ago. She would often stand and watch me for a while, and then without saying a word walk away, and I have often found her standing looking into the sea near the place where my father committed suicide, and when this all flashed through my mind, I asked the judge if I could not take her and care for her at the orphanage, and he granted my request, and while I was asking that privilege of him, I felt that in a small way I might do a little in righting one of my father’s wrongs. She always calls me Albert, and insists upon mending my clothes, and has often asked me if she might not cook for me things to eat.”

As Merle listened he said to himself: “The true love of a woman.”

When Aunt Mary reached the place where they sat the writer spoke to her as he arose,

but there was no response nor sign of recognition, for her mind was blank as to the past. Arturo put his arm around her shoulder as he talked with Merle, and as confiding as a child, the old woman nestled close in the embrace of his protecting arm and was oblivious to the surroundings, and when Arturo looked down at her, Merle saw a wonderful light in his eyes. "The knowledge of life and understanding and what one can do if they will," he mused. "He is giving rainbow tints to the twilight of the dear old soul's life here on this earth."

"Your life story," he said, as Arturo and Aunt Mary were about to turn in the direction of the orphanage, "would be excellent material for a book."

Arturo stopped quickly, and again Merle saw that wonderful light in his eyes and was satisfied.

"You may use it if you wish." He hesitated a moment, and then in much spirit and with a happy smile, continued: "And in using it, tell the world about my being alone on the desert and how through you God showed me the way to a path where my soul was saved and led to happiness." And as he finished speaking, he turned and with one arm around Aunt Mary walked away in the direction of the orphanage.

As Merle watched them pass from sight, he thought of how "Real happiness lies in what we do for others," and he recalled Aunt Mary's words "Isn't life beautiful?"

THE END.

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